

# **Horizon**

**A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART**

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## **THE ART CRITICISM OF RUSKIN**

*by* ROBIN IRONSIDE

## **TWO CHILDREN:**

### **(i) TRAILING CLOUDS**

*by* G. W. STONIER

### **(ii) NAUGHTY MANS**

*by* SEUMAS BOY PHELAN

## **BOSWELL'S PROGRESS—III**

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## **THE POET AND THE REVOLUTION**

*by* D. MARTENS

REVIEW *by* C. M. BOWRA

POEMS *by* LOUIS MACNEICE, STEPHEN SPENDER *and*  
JOHN ARLOTT

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MONTHLY: ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE NET

JULY VOL. VIII, No. 43 1943

***Edited by Cyril Connolly***

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# HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

Vol. VIII No. 43 July 1943

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## ABOUT THIS NUMBER

THE 'Two Children,' in this number, both represent attempts to apprehend the mystery of childhood. Mr. Stonier is an author trying to recapture the true sensations of a little boy by casting back with his imagination. Mr. Phelan, proceeding by direct observation, has taken down the talk of his son. Scumas Boy was between the ages of three and five (present age) when these records were kept, and they show the effect on a sturdy and sensitive child of the blitz and the abnormal existence which he has had to lead, with his mother in hospital after the bombing, and his father forced to look after him and earn his living in Fleet Street at the same time. This fragment is from a long manuscript which Mr. Phelan has called 'Naughty Mans' and to which Auden's lines on a tyrant might serve as a motto:

When he laughed respectable senators burst with laughter  
And when he cried, the little children died in the streets.

A further article on Russian literature (A. N. Tolstoy, Ehrenburg, etc.) in the next number will bring the articles of Mr. Martens and Dr. Bowra down to the present day.

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LOUIS MACNEICE  
THYESTES

When the King sat down to the feast and the golden lid revealed  
The human cutlets and the Graces sang  
Their lays of love returned and lovers meeting,  
Did his blood tell him what his mind concealed?  
Didn't he know—or did he—what he was eating?

Thus Here and We, neither of which is what  
The mind and map admit, in perfidy are linked;  
This green foam frets away our sense of duty  
While we, who watch it blossom and bulge, are not  
Spectators in our hearts but murderers of beauty.

Cannibalism and incest: such is time,  
A trail of shaking candles, such are we  
Who garnish to pollute and breed to kill—  
Messmates in the eucharist of crime  
And heirs to two of those three black crosses on the hill.

# NUTS IN MAY

May come up with bird-din  
And May come up with sun-dint,  
May come up with water-wheels  
And May come up with iris.

In the sun-peppered meadow the shepherds are old,  
Their flutes are broken and their tales are told,  
And their ears are deaf when the guns unfold  
The new philosophy over the wold.

May come up with pollen of death,  
May come up with cordite,  
May come up with a chinagraph  
And May come up with a stopwatch.

In the high court of heaven Their tail-feathers shine  
With cowspit and bullspit and spirits of wine,  
They know no pity, being divine,  
And they give no quarter to thine or mine.

May come up with Very lights,  
May come up with duty,  
May come up with a bouncing cheque  
And an acid-drop and a bandage.

Yes, angels are frigid and shepherds are dumb,  
There is no holy water when the enemy come,  
The trees are askew and the skies are a-hum  
And you have to keep mum and go to it and die for your  
    life and keep mum.

May come up with fiddle-bows,  
May come up with blossom,  
May come up the same again,  
The same again but different.



# STEPHEN SPENDER

## LINES FOR EDITH SITWELL

There is midsummer  
Opens all the windows  
And drowns the houses  
In scent of dust and rose.

Vibrant transparency above  
The hills, is visible.  
At night the stars shine through a silence  
Tangible, audible.

Clear day, you trail  
Whispers of cherry and rambler.  
Sun, you'll gild the leaves to ghosts  
Golden in amber.

Within our distraught gale of days  
My secrecy listens  
To a dynamo of summer that revolves  
Generating what glistens:

Noon, the moon, straws of light,  
The ringed pulsations on the lake,  
Quietness folded on window sills,  
The loads the reapers make.

Would I might be the bough which night  
Dips in the dews! And wrung  
From my impregnated phosphorescence  
Honeyed petal of my tongue.

But I am tied on strips of time,  
Caged in minutes, made  
By men, exiled from the day's brilliance  
In a deliberate shade.

My future seems of prison cells  
Where each hour with a padlock waits,  
Numbered, steeled, amongst my fellows,  
Behind the gnashing gates.

Only, some moment slips between the bars  
Of the raging machines:  
It gleams with eternal rumours  
Of the high, midsummer scenes.

Man is that prison where his will  
Has shut without pity  
In a clock, eternity,  
In his fist, rose of infinity.

JOHN ARLOTT  
CRICKET AT WORCESTER: 1938

Dozing in deck-chair's gentle curve,  
Through half-closed eyes I watched the cricket,  
Knowing the sporting press would say  
'Perks bowled well on a perfect wicket'.

Fierce mid-day sun upon the ground;  
Through heat-haze came the hollow sound  
Of wary bat on ball, to pound  
The devil out of it, quell its bound.

Sunburned fieldsmen, flannelled cream  
Seemed, though urgent, scarce alive,  
Swooped, like swallows of a dream,  
On skimming fly, the hard-hit drive.

Beyond the score-box, through the trees  
Gleamed Severn, blue and wide,  
Where oarsmen 'feathered' with polished ease  
And passed in gentle glide.

The back-cloth, setting off the setting,  
Peter's cathedral soared,  
Rich of shade and fine of fretting  
Like cut and painted board.

To the cathedral, close for shelter  
Huddled houses, bent and slim,  
Some tall, some short, all helter-skelter,  
Like a sky-line drawn for Grimm.

This the fanciful engraver might  
In his creative dream have seen,  
Here, framed by summer's glaring light,  
Grey stone, majestic over green.

Closer, the bowler's arm swept down,  
The ball swung, swerved and darted,  
Stump and bail flashed and flew;  
The batsman pensively departed.

Like rattle of dry seeds in pods  
The warm crowd faintly clapped,  
The boys who came to watch their gods,  
The tired old men who napped.

The members sat in their strong deck-chairs  
And sometimes glanced at the play,  
They smoked, and talked of stocks and shares,  
And the bar stayed open all day.

ROBIN IRONSIDE

# THE ART CRITICISM OF RUSKIN

THE defenceless and, if the adjective can be so employed, voracious sensibility by which Ruskin was continually either oppressed or exalted, must be considered not only as explaining but also as excusing, the laughable, sometimes touching, puerilities of phrase and thought which weaken, at too many points, usually at the least opportune, the great but ill-sustained beauty of his judgements. It excuses them because it was the fountain whence his eloquence and insight flowed just as unrestrainedly as his obtuseness and absurdity. Had his intellect been capable of qualifying the strength of the impressions he received from Kate Greenaway or Marmontel, it might also have interfered with the ardent, immortal manner in which he gave himself up to Tintoretto or Abbeville. The force of his enthusiasm, a force in which his mental processes were drenched, has so often wrested an essence from the greatest works of art that its ill-governed range seems simply the defect inherent in a faculty more valuable, in this instance, than that of balanced judgement and one which, as Ruskin might have put it, discipline would have hampered more than licence has impaired. It was a faculty demanding constant exercise; pictures, buildings, statues made imperious calls upon his sensibility, but he required this summons, besought it of them, that sleep might not settle upon him, the lethargy of the world's miasmata, that his imagination might not be 'struck into numbness by the poisoned air'. His capacities for revulsion—from what was 'shapeless, colourless, deathful and frightful' in the visible signs of the civilization in which he found himself—were not less than his capacities for enthusiasm, and in either event his feelings were additionally violent for being quite undepartmentalized; the artistic sense was not for him an organ that might work independently; he allowed his entire being to be torn or uplifted by its operations; the penalty of lethargy was one he ran little risk of incurring and when he did incur it, it was nearer what he would have deemed to be the less dreadful

penalty of despair. He has described himself, possibly not without pride, as a man clothed in soft raiment, blown about hopelessly by storms of passion, a reed shaken by the wind.

In a spirit thus exposed, the 'chordal variety', the great inconsistency of utterance, were inevitable. We can understand that he could have known days in Venice when the city seemed bereft of all romance, 'only a heap of mud', the city of which he wrote, when she smiled upon him, that 'Time and Decay as well as the waves and tempests had been won to adorn her instead of to destroy, and might still spare for ages to come that beauty which seemed to have fixed for its throne the sands of the hour-glass as well as of the sea'. Inconstancy of this kind is an illustration of common experience; it is less usual to find such variations of mood accepted, with scant questioning, by an acute mind, as a basis of opinion, holding the direction of that opinion, indeed practically at their mercy. Ruskin would persuade us at one stage that we cannot have noble art without such old-fashioned virtues as justice and compassion; at another, he seems almost to claim a right to wickedness for the greatest artists, certainly regarding them as not to be judged by any conventional standard. He disappointed friends who prized in him a reverence for moral purity by his outraged response to their suggestion that he should remonstrate with Swinburne over the impurities of *Poems and Ballads*. Alternately, the vices of the multitude and their 'dim-eyed proprieties' offended him. Worshipping nature only more than he adored art, his ideas of truth in painting swerved about with extraordinary subtlety between a conviction that strict loyalty to natural appearances was a condition of fine painting and an imaginative awareness that fancy and abstraction convey truths which, indeed, Nature may have inspired, but which may require for their proper expression that groves of trees should be rearranged, the courses of streams deflected or the colours of the sky transmuted. He recoiled from an approach, in any attitude but one of awed absolute humility, to what was so variously perfect in its aspect as undefiled nature, but he could ask artists to realize for the sake of colour not to colour for the sake of realization, could assert that 'good colour is not necessarily the image of anything but itself' and that 'the most expressive art might be that which is least like nature'. The movements of his heart for and against particular artists were not less capricious

than his dealings with the broader issues of art criticism. Michelangelo, who unlocked the flow of his praise when he wrote *Modern Painters*, became the object of a subsequent attack, delivered in a lecture at Oxford, which his closest adherents were hardly able to condone. Attacked by *The Times* for the incongruity of an enthusiasm expended in almost equal measure, first upon Turner and then upon the pre-Raphaelites, he saw no difficulty in showing how pre-Raphaelite was the one and how Turnerian were the others.<sup>1</sup> The splendid, flushed materialism as he felt it to be—of Veronese summoned forth at one moment all the lavishness of appreciation of which he was capable; at another, the works of Giotto, the grave and intense mirror of a belief, moved him with an equal force. 'When the eye is exquisitely keen and pure', he wrote of pictures, 'it is fain to rest on grey films of shade, wandering rays of light and intricacies of tender form, passing over hastily, as unworthy or commonplace, what to a less educated sense appears the whole of the subject.' In the light of this passage, in the light of his response to Turner's final manner, the obscurity of which his own keen eye found to be 'dark with excess of light', his fury over Whistler must be seen again as characteristically inconsistent rather than as furnishing any ground for reproaches against the general quality of his perception. Had he been able to accept an invitation from Burne-Jones to visit the studio of Whistler, who was apparently prepared to be deferential, there is every likelihood that the painter's harmonies and symphonies would have rung melodiously for a critic who thought of a Carpaccio as a 'harmony in crimson and white', who could say on the subject of colour that 'it is the rich trebles that are sweet and precious'. He first saw Whistler's pictures and made his wretched criticism upon them at a period of spiritual distress when his published denunciations of the ugliness of life sounded, to Cardinal Manning, 'like the beatings of one's heart in a nightmare'; the changeful condition of his general temper could affect his artistic preferences not less strongly than these could create in him a political bias or a moral state. Proust questioned whether he loved medieval art because

<sup>1</sup> The establishment of such a likeness is, however, the less surprising for being based upon a study of the Turner watercolours then at Farnley Hall; they are sufficiently meticulous to furnish some ground for relating Turnerian to Pre-Raphaelite landscape.



it was religious or loved religion because it was the motive of medieval art; we may, however, reasonably assume that the latter view—and it is the more sympathetic—is a truer illustration of the customary functioning of his mind; we can say that a kind of atheism, born of despair, possessed him without quenching his religious fervour, a too beautiful thing for him to suffer its extinction, that he was able to preserve unshaken a faith in the value of class distinctions, out of which the splendour of chivalry had arisen, while advancing Socialist views which were an inspiration in orthodox Labour circles,<sup>1</sup> views which were less views than wounded protests against the meanness of so much of the contemporary prospect, whence refuge for millions of persons, supposing any number of them even sought it, was impossible.

To extract a unity, some coherent thread of thought from the teeming volumes of his art criticism by judicious re-groupings, careful reference to the fitful state of his health, of his knowledge, is, however, less a labour requiring forced interpretation than one which is irrelevant to any true measure of the critic's genius as it has survived for us. Ruskin himself was addicted to classifications, numberings and sub-numberings of the points in his demonstrations, but these were idiosyncratic, not part of any grand intellectual system to which the writer felt constrained to adhere. On the contrary, he did not deny, he even welcomed the charge of inconsistency, citing, with a sort of frivolity, the Bible as sufficient warrant for any amount of it. The charge was in any case superfluous; that sensitive appreciation must be fluid, mercurial, he had at various moments emphatically recognized. Unless important changes, he declared, were occurring continually, all his life long in a man's opinions, not one of those opinions could be, on any questionable subject, true. True taste he saw as 'forever growing, learning, reading, worshipping, laying its hand upon its mouth because it is astonished', and he has said that 'though there is much work in the world to be done, it is often the best thing a man can do—to tell the exact truth about the movements of his mind', a course which in his case, as surely should be so with any mind that would move openly

<sup>1</sup> A questionnaire submitted to the Labour members of the Parliament of 1906 revealed that Ruskin's *Unto This Last* had been more widely read among them than any other single work.

and in freedom, was bound to lead to great contradictions. A freely moving mind, a sensibility pliant to the faintest breath, a heart in which 'the charities of the imagination' were perpetually at work, such a combination of qualities, such a vulnerability to impressions composed the flexible foundation on which Ruskin produced his criticism; the kind of structure that was to rise upon this heaving basis depended on the critic's power of self-expression, on his ability to analyse his reactions rather than the objects which evoked them. Fortunately, Ruskin found words which, often enough and clearly enough, were a golden echo of his feelings. His writings abound in precepts as much as in classifications, but he may well have been as lost among them as his readers must be; whatever the value of his many doctrines, of the significance, that has so often been appraised, of his rôle as a reformer in all matters, it is in the passages of rhapsody, in the subtle analyses of his own conflicting emotions, that his spirit is today most alight. Compared with these, recent art criticism in England is an affair of flat balanced notions, careful peepings and botanizations which come near to reducing the importance of the subject to that of an amenity recommendable on rational grounds to all; whereas the subject has, in fact, an importance that can be plausibly elevated to that of an end, related to other ends, of living, or even—if it is not a contradiction in terms—to that of a substitute for living. Ruskin at least leaves us in no doubt that he is dealing with a passionate issue, momentous to anyone able to grasp its inspiring breadth. When his feelings were, so to speak, 'tuned in' to some great production, when there was no mental storm to interfere with perfect 'reception', we are made to see degrees of light and intensity in the work which had not been thus shown up before, or, if we do not know it already, to long to know the painting, the fragment of carving or the city<sup>1</sup> that had struck such a chord within him, a chord with such elaborate reverberations. It must be said that these moments of responsive poetry are like the rich seams in a labyrinthine mine; they do not evenly suffuse his writing, but startle the reader in isolated paragraphs, appendices, footnotes, amply compensating for the dead intervals—and Ruskin's

<sup>1</sup> Proust has related that the vitality of Ruskin's description of a tiny carved figure on one of the *soubassements* of Rouen Cathedral induced him and a companion to make a special journey to discover its whereabouts.

paroxysms can be as lifelessly set down as the rarer passages of simple dulness—in the thirty-nine volumes of Cook and Wedderburn's triumphant edition of his Works.<sup>1</sup>

The visionary depth of his perception is opened up for us not so much by the disentanglement of its elements as by an accretion of imagery and adornment without which its quality was not to be conveyed; he was always at the rich mercy of his own Pathetic Fallacy. He never wrote with the compelling obscurity of that type of great man, of whom he speaks, 'on whom Revelations rain till they bear him to the earth' and who 'lays his head in the dust and speaks thence—often in broken syllables'; but the fallacy of metaphor and simile was, as he has acknowledged, not the less a sign, when spontaneously adopted, of the fact of revelation. Of the relation of the human creature, as an artist, to the inconceivable universe, he wrote, with just such an instinctive certainty, that each 'must slowly spell out and long contemplate such part of it as may be possible for him to reach; then set forth what he has learned of it for those beneath him; extricating it from infinity as one gathers a violet out of grass; one does not improve either violet or grass in gathering it, but one makes the flower visible; and then the human being has to make its power upon his own heart visible also. . . . And sometimes he may be able to do more than this, and to set it in strange lights, and display it a thousand ways before unknown.' This is a comparison which illuminates a multitude of aspirations, not least those with which art has been most recently concerned. The progress of his roving consideration of the masterpieces of European art is, at intermittent but frequent turns, arrested by spasms of such expository, or, it may be, descriptive poetry; he saw the crests of the arches of St. Mark's, 'the central building of the world', 'break into a marble foam, and toss themselves far into the blue sky in flashes and wreaths of sculptured spray as if the breakers on the Lido shore had been frost-bound before they fell and the sea nymphs inlaid them with

<sup>1</sup> The Library Edition (Allen) 1903–1911. This masterpiece of scholarship, now obtainable second-hand for five or six guineas, has made any further research on its subject superfluous; Sir E. T. Cook (1857–1919), apart from the immense labour it involved, also published a biography of Ruskin, was successively editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Westminster Gazette*, and the *Daily News*, and was the author of books on Florence Nightingale and John Delane.

coral and amethyst'. Further north, the Cathedral front was 'lost among the tapestry of its traceries like a rock among the thickets of spring'; with the advent of Gothic architecture, the pillar had grown slender, the vaulted roof light 'until they had wreathed themselves into the semblance of the summer woods', of woods stirred by a disquiet breath, the dreaming Gothic spirit 'that wanders hither and thither among the niches, and flickers feverishly round the pinnacles, and frets and fades in labyrinthine knots and shadows along wall and roof, and yet is not satisfied nor shall be satisfied'. To penetrate what must appear to be, in contrast to the 'wolfish life' that lurked amid the forest of northern Gothic, the closed garden of early Italian painting, was, for Ruskin, to enter the inside of a pearl, a region where appeared rivers flowed between margins of marble past alternate azure promontories, a limpid, remote vision which Renaissance painting was to bring magnificently to earth, dazzling his attention by 'the coruscation of lightning and the flash of sunshine on the points of spears'. Tintoretto takes a fold of cloud from 'the flanks of the Alps and shows the mountains through its misty volume like seaweed through deep sea'. A figure by Veronese is surrounded with 'infinite daylight', but also invested 'with innumerable veils of faint shadow'. Ruskin saw the sixteenth-century masters, however, above all Titian and Veronese, as the great illustrators of mortal glory; they helped him to loosen the bonds, dear though these were, of the religion in which he had been brought up. He was at moments captivated by their preference for gems over flowers, by their undistinguishing association of tyrants with Holy Infants, luxuriousness with Madonnas, but he was also to sense, at last, the presence of a profound religion in this dethronement of the divine characters, their establishment amid the profanities of the vivid life—to so many appearances a pagan one—of the epoch. Much less inconstant, though less powerful, was his appreciation of their relish of the sheer obscurity and brightness of the spectacle of nature. Ruskin is most persuasive when the images that came most readily to his mind were those of the sky, the sea or the landscape. In the paintings of Turner upon which, for him, the poetry of Wordsworth supplied the proper comment, he found a vision which lingered faithfully over 'the irregular stains and mouldering hollows' of nature's detail, which,

steadfastly, looked 'to the conflagration for its flames and to the cataract for its iris' and was able to reveal a spirituality in nature by such a loyalty to her aspects; it was a vision that was alike remote from the limpid conventions of early religious art and the earthbound inspiration of Renaissance naturalism. Ruskin poured out rhetoric upon it; he found that there was not a stone, leaf or shadow or anything so small but that Turner gave it 'meaning and oracular voice'. He was a painter who was equally a master of the larger effects, able alone to give the 'fury and formalism of breakers on an even shore' or, in the late water-colours, to convey the movement of 'wreaths of fitful vapour gliding through groves of pine and irised around the pillars of waterfalls', or of 'glades whispering with the lapse of everlasting springs'. Ruskin's insight was sharpened by those passions in which he felt most confidence: his love of Turner was open-eyed and he recognized that all that the artist 'planned on any principle or in supposed obedience to canons of taste, was false and abortive; he only did right when he ceased to reflect . . . was successful only when he had taken no aim'. Turner's over-wrought, over-pondered academy exhibits in his later years are a pitiful proof of the rightness of this estimate. Of his very last paintings, Ruskin wrote the revealing epitaph that they 'presented the sum and perfection of his accumulated knowledge delivered with the impatience and passion of one who knows too much and has too little time to say it in, to pause for expression or ponder over his syllables. There was in them the obscurity, but the truth of prophecy; the instinctive, but burning language which would express less if it uttered more, which is indistinct only by its fullness'.

Among his manifold allegiances, Ruskin's devotion to Turner was the most perfectly responsive; he was never able to dissociate his affections for art and nature which burnt in a unison, into a single flame, distorting with a curious pathos, not to say beauty, his attempts to consider either separately; Turner's art, with all the brilliance of less ordinary, more obvious qualities, was also—Ruskin proved it—a mirror of the phenomena of nature, providing his critic with what seemed to be an identity of invention with the demonstrable truth of aspects. Ruskin's endless, distracted quest for this identity in all the products, whatever their specific uses, of creative human labour, a quest



leading him to follow tracks the complexity and ambiguity of which he scarcely foresaw, is a key to the extraordinary antinomies which mark his most reflective writings upon art; it was a quest embarked upon at the dictation of an antinomy in his sensibility which could not permit any generic difference between its reactions to landscape-painting and to landscape. Ruskin was an artist who looked at works of art with the subtlety and enthusiasm of a connoisseur, and a connoisseur who regarded nature with the devotion of an artist. His own drawings, at their best, live not by their invention, but by their display, from all angles, of those habits of nature's growth that are too slight, too momentary or too refined to attract the scrutiny, as Ruskin scrutinized, of the ordinary observer. Yet it remained true that no delicacy of execution, no abnormal clarity of sight, could give again one hundredth part of the beauty of a fragment of mica or syenite or of 'a drooping swathe of rain'. 'The deep, palpitating azure, half æther, half dew', of an early summer sky, 'the half-lighted horizons' of April, 'the smoking sides' of an Alp were profaned by the hopeless endeavour to imitate them. More than anything else, the springs of Ruskin's poetical manner of writing were fed upon the sensations of melancholy and ecstasy, 'the prison hopes', and fears, that crowded upon him anxiously, irresistibly amid the sights and sounds of nature, in a mountain shower or in 'the scented darkness of a pine wood', and became ever afterwards the light and shade in his memory; the art of Venice must have meant less to him without the mantle of the Adriatic and of the Venetian sky breaking into 'an open, long gulf of amber green'; he would have preferred the Piazza to have been a field, and the shafts of St. Mark's to have been 'rooted in wild violets'. Even the clear glass held up by Turner to the beauty of scarlet lichens or of the 'drifting wings' of clouds, was not without spots and opacities which impaired a transparency that could not, in any case, have shown all. Ruskin went so far as to declare that it was a sign of the greatest art to part voluntarily with its greatness in deference to the thing represented, Turner's *Falls of Terni*, for example, inspiring him chiefly with a regret that he was not on the spot, that the goats did not actually skip away among the rocks and the spray float above the fall. It was inevitable that trains of association and recollection should lead a mind that stood thus in awed gratitude before nature to hold,

for however brief an instant, such an extreme conclusion as to the purposes of painting. It was not a view to which he would have adhered a moment longer than the feelings remained which produced it, but the memory of, and regret for lost sojourns, in places to revisit which was not to recapture the happiness they had evoked, were always prompt to rise to their full pitch of vividness at the touch of an impression recorded by a spirit that had taken hold, with greater retentive force, of kindred vibrations. The regret was much more than mere disappointment at an imitation, reaching indeed a level where it became a satisfaction, the action of the memory, aided by the imagination, being positively a creative process, rejecting, selecting and composing, and so, when we recall an experience, 'with a kind of conceptive burning-glass, we may bend the sunshine of all the day, and the fullness of all the scene upon every point that we successively seize'. In a frame of mind less chagrined than that in which he wrote about the *Falls of Terni*, Ruskin applied a like estimate of the potentialities of memory to Turner, discovering that his composition was 'universally an arrangement of remembrances summoned just as they were wanted and set each in its fittest place'; in a dream, there was this kind of remembrance 'of forms seen long ago and now associated under new and strange laws'. Ruskin, however, could not but be aware that an attitude to painting, which even left room for the supposition that, by and large, the art was a vain, not to say a presumptuous mimicry—though anything it left room for, not excluding the vanity of regrets, might be turned to gold when passed through such a medium—required revision, refinement, amplification, if it was to fit the magnitude of the effect that pictures had upon him; he therefore sought, and found an artistic truth, or rather genuineness, the pursuit of which justified really any liberties that the artist might take with his subject; it was a truth of fancy, not of fact, a truth to the thoughts raised up in the artist by the shifting appearances of the world, not to the unfathomable truths of Nature herself, which, after all, were only dimly penetrable by the thoughts they engendered, and not in the least by scientific measurements and matchings of tints. 'Whatever', he wrote, 'has been the result of strong emotion is ill seen unless through the medium of such emotion, and will lead to conclusions utterly false and perilous,

if it be made a subject of cold-hearted observance, or an object of systematic imitation.' A picture should never be deceptively real; the mind of the artist must be to what he paints 'as the fire to the body on the pile, burning away the ashes, leaving the unconquerable shade'. Ruskin also clung to the conception that, since the painter cannot put Nature into his picture, since he should deal with the influence of Nature upon him, then he should put nothing into his work which is not suggestive; if he would summon the imaginative power of the spectator to join with his own, then 'he must turn it to account and keep it employed'.

It was thus that the claims—simultaneous rather than conflicting—upon his heart of nature and the arts were made soluble, made to float into one another, so that his memory and the play of the painter's imagination upon it, his affectionate, exact knowledge of rocks and clouds and the painter's tempering and casting of it upon canvas or paper, might—other circumstances being propitious—merge together into a joyful absorption of the last ounce of feeling that the detail, or the sum, of a fine landscape could be made to yield. The largeness of the feeling was rooted in its impurity; the sole delight in design, in the harmony or contrast of colour would have been shallow, even frivolous. It was plain to Ruskin that 'as soon as a great sculptor begins to shape his work out of the block we shall see that its lines are nobly arranged and of noble character. We may not have the slightest idea for what the forms are intended'. But even if it had been possible for him to isolate for long his recognition of such nobility, referable indeed only to visual satisfactions (a recognition that is crude or refined, as an estimate of the layout of a printed page or the savour of a dish may be crude or refined), he would properly have found it to bear the slenderest relation—though he would never have denied the necessity of the relation—to his recognition of the beauty of the finished work. The intrusion of the nature lover upon the art critic enriched the feelings of both; it is, however, only as the most constant and possibly as the most fruitful of the many ambiguities of Ruskin's thought that it puts forward some claim to be the principal compound in the great mixture of sensations produced in him by the contemplation of works of art—a passionate contemplation the quality of which was affected by, and affected, in turn or together, the scientist in

him, the philosopher, the historian, not least the obscure, unsatisfied amorist and above all the moralist. The beauty, as the largeness, of the quality is in its whole-heartedness, its whole-mindedness; it is confined by no narrowing notions of purely æsthetic propriety, of the kind that give such a small flavour to people's appreciation of the arts today. 'Appreciation' is the term in current use and aptly circumscribes a poverty of outlook which excludes what must be called the force of emotional weaknesses, reduces the matter of poetry to one of surface manipulation and fails to recognize in the excesses of surrealism<sup>1</sup> an effect of its own frosty emphasis on barren superficialities. The prestige of the visual arts, apparently growing, would be incomprehensible, if not an imposture, attached to a conception of their nature as appealing to faculties that could be isolated from the hopes and frustrations of living.

It is in Ruskin's earlier writings that we must look for nearly all that is evergreen in the expression of his complex susceptibility to works of art, and chiefly in *Modern Painters*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and the great *Stones of Venice*, though the fifth and final volume of *Modern Painters* was not completed until 1860 when the writer was forty-one. Ruskin was the only child of affluent parents who were both prepared and hopeful that he should devote his adult life to the cultivation of a boyhood talent for writing verse, but he could not dedicate his energies to a particular activity without an overriding impulse, a clear demand from his conscience to do so. Whatever his potential capacities as a poet, there was no such call upon him to fulfil them; it was, on the other hand, a violent sense of the injustice of the accepted critics to the later paintings of Turner that pushed him, at the age of twenty-four, conscience-stricken, incensed and in large ignorance of the work of earlier masters, to defend the artist in print, a defence which led him to an expanding, enamoured study of the visual arts, to an enraptured realization that it was his duty to share with everyone the treasures of experience he had thus won, and which developed into the intricate, unwieldy structure of *Modern Painters* and the books

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that Ruskin foresaw that the realms of the fantastic imagination 'have hardly yet been entered and that a universe of noble dream-land lies before us yet to be conquered', a conquest that would be a 'true unison of the grotesque with the realistic power'.

that followed. The personal happiness that he found in the prosecution of this duty was not, however, to be borne in comfort: the material ease in which he lived assured him the freedom to enjoy a universe of sensation which, however inspiring his expositions of it might be, was made inaccessible to the majority—he was compelled to admit—by the ugly circumstances of economic drudgery in which they lived. It came upon him with force that the rich, whose expenditure was wasteful and ostentatious, had ‘literally entered into partnership with Death’ and ‘dressed themselves in his spoils’. He felt more and more obliged to direct the vehemence of his mind to the exposure of social evils and to the organization of schemes for their removal. This re-orientation may be said to have been fully launched in 1862 with the publication of his economic views in *Unto This Last*; it represented as much, to him, a ransom to be paid for the years which a private income had enabled him to spend in amplifying his sensibility as an endeavour to clear the ground for the reception of what he had to say. The bitterness of the endeavour so exhausted his nerves that his ire was always trembling on the verge of infantile petulance, that his mind was positively driven to seek rest in intervals of insanity. It was a situation in which he was unable to give full attention to the imprint on his own spirit of the great works which he had, decreasingly, time to consider. His later art criticism, with its diminishing quantity, was also more liable to passages of absurdity and obstinacy, the results both of an over-wrought system and of the adulation of disciples. One would not belittle the salutary extent of his activity as a reformer; although the state of affairs he attacked in which the arts fulfil their comprehensive function for a too small minority, is still one that engages, and is likely to go on engaging, the efforts of progressive minds, he had none the less melancholy grounds for supposing that age had given him better work to do, than had the delusion—if it was such—of his youth, but it could not give again, could only exquisitely recall, in *Præterita*, the demonstrative sweetness of that delusion, with which so much poetry and revelation had been associated.



# TWO CHILDREN

G. W. STONIER

## I—TRAILING CLOUDS

### THE HOUSE

HERE is the house. Press the bell—ah, it doesn't ring, we must knock instead. The door is opened by the maid. Her name is Louisa.

Where are all the family?

Mr. Adams is in the garden, rolling the lawn. The children—but where can they have hidden themselves?—are in the garden too.

Mrs. Adams is upstairs, resting after lunch and enjoying a new novel by the Williamsons.

Mamselle is ironing a blouse in the kitchen.

Louisa has gone back to the scullery door, where she is talking to Mr. Reed the greengrocer.

Rat-tat-tat at the front door. 'Again! What a to-do!' cries Louisa running. Who can it be this time? The postman? No. Is it the butcher? No. Is it Santa Claus? No.

It is the moon-faced boy with a parcel addressed to Grandpa.

But Grandpa isn't due till next week.

The dog next-door barks because he can't abide strangers.

The children—where have they appeared from?—creep to the fence so as to squint through at the dog barking. He is a big brown retriever named Hector. 'Ooooooooo,' wails Hector. 'Bow-wow,' whisper the children, 'woof-woof! bang-a-bang!' Hector looks terrible. His legs begin to shiver and his chain rattles. If he goes on like this his eyes will drop out.

'Oh the crysanths!' Mr. Adams has started up from the corner of the lawn where he is grubbing daisies. 'Walter and Alfred, come! No, stop where you are, be careful of the flower-beds!'

And Hector wails and Mr. Adams comes flapping, and at the window, looking down, Mrs. Adams says quietly, 'You pair of young Turks, I saw you.'

## HORIZON

## MIND YOU

It's never safe to leave them a minute; though, mind you, they can be as good as gold.

## WHERE'S WALTER?

One morning after a royal chase, up hill and down dale, they found him squatting in the middle of the nursery, arguing with the window-cleaner that the tree by the rose-bush wasn't an apple.

'It's a russet,' he was insisting, when the door opened.

'There's my fine gentleman,' said Louisa, shaking him. 'Come off that po, now. Do you think you can sit there all day?'

## LOOK!

Mother held him up at the window. Look, Dadda's coming.

A lot of people, a long way off, walking across the green from the station.

'Dadda's coming,' he echoed, touching the pane.

Mother held him close. He felt her softness and in the middle of that softness the sharp edge of her brooch.

'Look!' she said again.

But it was snowing. All he saw was the snowflakes falling.

## BRICKS

He sat on the floor cross-legged, playing bricks. Pagodas, bridges, a log cabin rose and fell. He started to build a tower, but kicked it flying.

On the carpet in front of him there was a furry patch of sunlight. He had been watching it out of the corner of his eye. It moved, crept away, vanished, and scurried back.

Everything now was quiet in the room round the bright furry patch.

He grew excited. He leant forward. His knee cut against the sharp corner of a brick and in dull amazement he watched the slow purple drop collect.

## GRANDPA

Grandpa's parcel stands on the hall table. It is a long box wrapped in shiny green paper and tied with string. No one can

go to the front door, or cross from drawing-room to dining-room, without seeing it. At first it looked wonderful, as though any moment it might fly open. Every knock on the door was Grandpa's. (Hector began to bark). But the news came that Grandpa wasn't so well, and he went to Brighton for the air, and the days passed by. Letters, a pair of gloves came and went, but the parcel remained. It grew dusty, and Louisa dusted it. Nobody bothers to say, Don't touch. One day it will be opened, but meanwhile Grandpa has forgotten it, and the children have almost forgotten Grandpa.

### THE NIGHTLIGHT

At some moment in the night it must go out because in the morning it's gone.

The nightlight!

He never thinks, as he goes to sleep, of that time between the nightlight going out and daylight coming. He shuts his eyes and prays that when they open it will be day.

But one night, waking suddenly, he found the whole room flickering. Flutter, flutter, and then the light went out. He blinked awhile; it was so dark he could see nothing. But they were there. Mouths whispered. Black dog leapt forward. Policeman leant over to grasp his hair, and he heard the words, 'Lock you up in the cook-shop'. He screamed.

When at last the door opened, Mother and Dadda ran in to find him sobbing under the bedclothes. He couldn't explain. Mother held him and told him a story. 'Once upon a time . . . the King had a daughter, the most beautiful in the land . . . so Florizel attacked and killed the dragon. . . .'

There are times when the nightlight isn't needed. The dog and the policeman are away, and nothing hurts. Or they are there, but flattened back in the shadow.

Then he slips out of bed to peer underneath at his lightship floating in water. Moths hover round, a spider shoots into a crack. The flame trembles, so that he holds his breath, and then with a shudder rights itself. He climbs back into bed, tired with gazing.

And later, when the nightlight has gone out and darkness crowds around, he doesn't know.

And in the morning it is all forgotten.

## ONCE UPON A TIME

in a far away country, there was a little boy who picked his nose. 'Are you hungry?' asked the King, his Father. 'No,' said the little boy, for there was a chicken-wing on the sideboard. 'Why do you do it then, Walter?' asked the Queen. 'Now here is a nice white handkerchief and you can blow, blow, blow.' So he blew and blew, and he went out walking in the gardens, and played with the squirrels and rabbits, and sat down by the lake to pick his nose. But God was watching. 'Don't *do* that!' shouted God, in a voice that made Walter jump. He pulled his finger out like lightning, and it was covered with blood.

## TEA ON THE LAWN

While Mr. Adams read his newspaper and the children made faces, Mrs. Adams poured out tea and talk.

'Do you remember,' she said, 'how hot it was that August, the milk had turned and there was a plague of wasps, and Florence and I had tea on the Saturday at Kew before going to the Gondoliers. . . .'

'I remember,' said Mr. Adams.

'You're not listening,' she said, 'but it was that year, soon after Florence had gone, I think, that. . . .'

The sun flashed off Louisa's specs. She had to walk quite a long way from the house, with more milk and a jug of water. Alfred was playing with a caterpillar.

'Why don't we have all our meals out of doors?' thought Walter. He conceived a plan of living entirely in the garden; he would make a tent and when it rained he would go and live in that.

He stared curiously at the house as he always did when outside it, thinking: 'That's the nursery, there's the fireplace, there's the cupboard with the bricks and the toys.' He had to guard over these when he wasn't there.

The shadow of the fence had moved across so that the lawn was cut in two. White clouds sat comfily overhead. Leaves rustled. Mrs. Adams went on talking.

## THE LADYBIRD

He charged into the drawing-room where there were visitors sitting round. They leant and smirked and stared.

'I've dropped my ladybird,' he said uneasily.

His Mother kissed him and smoothed his hair. 'Why not go and find it, poppet?'

And though till that moment ladybirds has been the last thought in his mind, he went out to find one.

#### MAMSELLE,

who has a cold and smells of lavender, says he ought to have been a girl; it was such a pity, she thinks, when his curls had to go. Mamselle tied a shawl round his face and snatched him up to kiss him. She made him look at himself in the mirror. But he is up to various tricks and they have caught him drinking ink, and when the picture fell down it can only have been Walter.

Little Alfred once swallowed a threepenny bit.

#### GOAT

Dadda had been talking to Mamselle. 'Gautier,' he said, dancing a few steps, 'is French for Walter, so in future we'd better call him Gautier.'

Walter was doubtful: where would it lead?

'Goat,' said his brother, 'goat, goat. . .'

'Shut up, you podge.'

Dadda: 'Goat'.

It was settled.

'Besides,' added his Mother, 'you have a Cousin Walter and an Uncle Walter already.'

Other things as well as names run in the family. Even the cow's lick that makes him part his hair on the right instead of the left is shared by another Walter.

#### BUT ON SUNDAY

'On Monday,' said Goat, "I go to Felixstowe."

'On Tuesday, I build a boat and fly a kite.

'On Wednesday, I ride a cock-horse.

'On Thursday—oh on Thursday, I drive an engine all day and all night without stopping.

'On Friday, I pick up two page boys and throw them on the roof and catch them, like Hereward the Wake.

'On Saturday, I go fishing.

'On Sunday—'

C



'But on Sunday,' said Mamselle, who was passing, 'you go to church, *n'est-ce pas? Parlons toujours français. Lundi, mardi. . .*'

#### PRAYERS

Goat: 'Please God bless Grandmas and Grandpas, Mother and Dadda, Louisa and Alfred, and all kind friends, and make me a good boy, Amen.' He opened his eyes. 'I wonder what's in that parcel for Grandpa.'

Louisa: 'What's that?'

Goat: 'Grandpa's parcel in the hall. It's been there for ages. I wonder when Grandpa'll be coming.'

Louisa: 'Oh, next week or the week after.'

Goat: 'What's in it, Louisa, do you think?'

Louisa: 'Shirts, I dare say.'

Goat: 'Shirts! But he's got shirts, Louisa, don't you think it's a train or something—a bow and arrows?'

Louisa: 'Now, whatever should your Grandpa be doing with a bow and arrows?'

Goat: 'Oh, but it's a present, it's sure to be. Grandpa always brings us a present.'

Louisa: 'You know best, of course. Hop into bed, now.'

Alfred, who ought to have been asleep long ago, said suddenly, 'It's an elephant.'

He has a teddy bear which he takes to bed with him; Walter is too big for that; he hugs his thoughts, dreaming of the gun, the acrobats, and the tortoise in the garden.

'Midnight,' said Louisa. 'Sweet repose. Where you lay your head, may you find your nose.'

#### THE HEATH

where Dadda takes them fishing or they go walking with Mamselle, can just be seen from the top window. It stretches for miles and miles. Beyond the walks and football pitches, there are fields and ponds and woods, then more fields, and sandy hills, and still there's no end.

Goat: 'There are wolves on the Heath.'

Louisa: 'You don't say. Mind you don't fall out of that window.'

#### DRAWING LESSON

Goat: 'I like winter best, it's easier to draw.'

He was scribbling a landscape: a daisy for the sun, two leg-of-mutton hills, willows like spiders impaled on matchsticks.

Dadda, bending over: 'You haven't put in any birds.'

Goat: 'How? Show me.'

Dadda drew neatly a number of spread V's at different angles.

Goat: 'Why they're just like birds!'

Dadda: 'It's easy. You do it like—that.' With a flourish he added another V.

Goat went on drawing, alone. Soon the air was so thick with birds it looked as though a thunderstorm had blown up and the sun disappeared. On this blackest of skies he wrote the secret Word, which no one, not even God, must know. He covered it with a heavy criss-cross. He tore the paper to bits. These, one by one, he swallowed.

#### MRS. ADAMS

When Mother was going out to a party, he liked the getting ready, but wanted her to stay. She sat, in silks or lace, at the table with the mirrors, giving the finishing touches to her hair, or stood for Louisa to do up the back. 'Are you ready, George?' she would call impatiently to Mr. Adams in the other room. 'Coming dear,' was the answer.

'Now be off, Walter, don't get in the way so, you know you should be in bed.'

Off he went, but she was everywhere. Gloves and a fan on the hall-table. Flowers in the drawing-room. Bracelets, rings, scent bottle. On such occasions his Mother became restless, beautiful and distant, and this awed and troubled him.

Above all he loved her scent.

One afternoon in the street he smelt it and turned round with a cry expecting to see his Mother. It was a strange lady, twirling a parasol, who smiled and nodded.

#### KING OF THE CASTLE

And when Mother and Dadda went out there were only Alfred and Louisa left. Goat jumped on a cushion and sang:

'I'm King of the Castle,  
Get away you dirty rascal.'

Little Alfred didn't budge; in fact he tried to jump on the cushion too.

Goat gave him a push, then hit him. It was a funny thing that Alfred didn't fight back or run away, and in a rage Goat hit harder.

He got a good smack from Louisa for that and felt he'd earned it.

All the same, later that evening, he marched into the kitchen where Louisa was sewing and opened his pyjama trousers wide, just to show her. Then she came after him in earnest.

#### ACORNS

The squeak of a swing next door interrupted Goat's gardening. He was busy planting acorns, as many acorns as he had been able to gather, which would grow overnight into oaks. People would be surprised, wondering where all the trees had sprung from. He looked up.

He lifted a loose paling and saw a small pretty boy swinging with pointed toes and floating arms. He picked up an acorn and threw it at him.

The little boy seemed surprised as though it had dropped out of one of those invisible oaks. Goat flung a handful and ran. 'It's not the first time I've caught you,' said his Father, who had been there all the time, waiting.

#### MRS. COPUS

Of the neighbours he liked Mrs. Copus best. The old lady, in shabby grey, reminded him of a sheep and always looked surprised when she opened her gate and walked through it. She passed the Adams's house nodding her head.

Mr. Adams: 'Good morning, Mrs. Copus.'

Mrs. Copus: 'What?'

Mr. Adams: 'Good morning, good morning.'

Mrs. Copus: 'Oh yes, good morning.'

That night Mr. Adams remarked: 'Mrs. Copus, I'm afraid, is getting very deaf. You have to shout at her and even then it's difficult to know how much she takes in.'

'Aunt Lucy used to say,' said Mrs. Adams, 'deaf people hear the most—not that Mrs. Copus is anything but harmless.'

Goat found that she was one of the few people he could talk to. She had Hector, poor lady, and seemed almost as scared of Hector as he was. When she was at all late in coming home, Hector was sent to fetch her.

#### THE COLLECTION

On his birthday Mrs. Copus gave him a butterfly net. He chased everything. Several cabbage whites, a tortoiseshell, a

little butterfly like a violet, a moth or two, even an earwig, were carried in a jar to the bathroom, dosed with ammonia and pinned on cardboard.

Before going down to tea, Goat decided to take a last look at his collection. All the insects had revived and mounted on pins were quietly rowing the air.

The gong sounded. Trembling, he thrust them into the darkest corner of the cupboard and stumbled downstairs to gorge on sandwiches, farthing buns and cake, so that Louisa and Alfred were astonished.

#### HECTOR

He encouraged Hector to bite his tail (a habit of Hector's) in the hope perhaps that he would end by curling up like whiting.

#### THE CAT

never caught a rat on the mat, but loved asparagus stalks, and when asparagus was cooking she was under everyone's feet. She didn't really belong to the Adams, and in the end, because of her always getting lost, they had to give her away. A friend of Louisa's came with a basket and sat in the kitchen. No sign of pussy. 'Put on the asparagus, Louisa,' said Mrs. Adams, 'and as soon as we've finished you can have the stalks, and then she'll come.'

#### KING EDWARD

One morning they heard that the King was dead. The milkman told Louisa, Louisa looked in the paper, and there it was. Poor King Edward, whatever you might say about him, he was loved by the people. He won the Derby. He was a good King. They stared at the pictures. At first Alfred thought it must be Grandpa.

When Dadda put on his top hat and picked up his gladstone bag to go into town, Mother made him change his tie for a black one. Mamselle walked in, black from tip to toe, but then she was always in mourning for her father who died in France. Walter and Alfred were given crêpe armlets before they went for their walk.

They could play as usual but they were to remember that the King was dead. People with white faces stood in the wind on street corners and in the park talking together. It was as though someone were ill and mustn't be disturbed. An old gentleman in

a deck chair spoke to Alfred and patted his head, but it was with a sad smile. There was very little sunshine that morning. King Edward, with his big sash and feathers in his hat, was dead.

Lying in state. . . . Windsor and Sandringham. . . . Queen Alexandra, quite beautiful, but quite a little thing. . . . in the time of the old Queen. . . . Mother and Mamselle and Louisa went on talking a long while after lunch. The cold wind grew colder. They had crumpets for tea. Dadda's cough, from the main road, was heard much earlier than usual. 'The Master!' said Louisa flying. 'Does he do it to warn us, do you suppose?' asked Mother, glancing at the photograph by the piano; 'he hasn't a cough really, or at least he's had one ever since I've known him.'

The photograph over the side-table showed a younger Mr. Adams with a raven moustache and without spectacles, wearing a very high collar for his wedding. Beside him, similarly framed, Mrs. Adams looked tall and beautiful in white lace.

Dadda's cough echoed in the porch; Louisa and he were laughing over something and scuffling; he ran in with his silk hat in one hand and a bone, which he had just picked up off the path, in the other. 'Look what I found, dearest!' he exclaimed in loud tones of amazement. Mother smiled and the children screamed: 'It's a bone!'

'Do for the stockpot, sir,' said Louisa from the doorway. 'Would you like your cup of tea?'

'Oh I would, I would,' he replied, flopping back in a chair. There were sweat beads on his forehead and on top of his head which the children, climbing on either arm of the chair, gazed at in astonishment.

'You must have been running,' said Mother, 'to get as hot as that.'

'Just hurrying a little,' said Dadda. 'It's warm.' ('It's a cold day,' insisted Mother.) 'Oh, your father rang up from Brighton to say he would be here tomorrow afternoon.'

'Oh, did he?' Mother exclaimed. 'And I suppose we've no say at all in the matter!'

Your father? Who could that be? The children stared at one another and at their father leaning his head back against a cushion. But Brighton? Then it must be Grandpa. Grandpa, at last, was coming.

## A LITTLE BIRD

Grandpa took no notice of the parcel in the hall but brought out a camera from one of his bags and made everyone go into the garden.

'The sun's coming out, sir,' cried Louisa.

A group hastily formed under the apple-tree.

Grandpa tugged at his beard, hummed, scanned the clouds, then brought his heels together and, over the camera, bowed to the little group in front. Mr. and Mrs. Adams were smiling, smiling, the two children looked stolidly.

Look at the little bird.

A door seemed to open and the sun shone. Click! The door closed.

Mr. Adams: 'Just in the nick of time.' He had been standing on tiptoe in order to appear taller.

Mrs. Adams: 'They look very well, I consider, in their silk jerseys and Russian caps. Don't you think so, Mamselle?'

Mamselle: '*Charmants. Ils ont toujours l'air très gentil, ces petits-là.*'

Mrs. Adams: 'What do you say, Louisa.?''

Louisa: 'Oh yes. Tea's ready, though.'

'*Kutch biwani*,' said Grandpa, '*pinnika pani*, now you don't know what that means, Mademoiselle, do you?' and they moved away.

The children stood where they were, hand in hand, wondering what it could have been that was now all over.

After tea Grandpa called for the parcel and untied it himself. Terrible the suspense as wrappings peeled away and the lid was raised to discover rolled canvas and a few thin sticks. Grandpa hesitated a moment, then the canvas unrolled, the sticks sprang into place, there was a final shudder and it stood up: a kite like a bird, but larger and brighter than any bird. 'Phew!' exclaimed Dadda, and 'You don't think it's too big?' asked Mother, but Grandpa said a kite like that would fly of itself, and went on to talk about a little native boy who drove his cattle through the jungle and used to beat off tigers with a stick.

## THE KITE

It flew like an angel. No kite ever soared so quickly or stayed up so long. Even the men sitting on chairs, who flew giants and

smoked pipes and sent messages into space, used to nod encouragement. Day after day it hung there like an anchor in the blue. Goat was dizzy with happiness. Then, late one afternoon, a gust of wind snatched the string out of his hand (Mamselle under the poplars was calling), the kite swooped away towards the embankment and rested there on telegraph wires. Trapped! Nothing would haul it down. The string was cut and after tea Goat lingered hoping that every breeze would bring release. It was there next morning, limp in the rain. More rain, and each day Goat went to look. A storm: still it clung. It remained a few days longer, a skeleton in the sky. Nothing more could happen. The hawk was lost.

### CORONATION DAY

On Coronation Day a huge Union Jack streamed over the porch, and little flags fluttered at the windows. Every house in the street had its flags, its picture of the new King and Queen. A band could be heard playing marches. There was straw on the road, but that was for poor old Mrs. Copus who was ill.

They started out early to see the procession. Everywhere were crowds and it took a long while, in tubes and buses, to reach the Admiralty where Uncle Willie was waiting. But at last they were there, and Uncle Willie had brought them ices on the balcony and they had settled down to watch the soldiers and the horses when Walter felt uncomfortable. 'I want to go,' he whispered to Mother, who replied quickly, 'You'll have to wait, then.' 'Oh but, Mother, I want to—' 'Which is it?' 'Number One.' They bundled out past the rows of people watching to a room at the back. Along passages, and then they had to wait outside the door. It opened at last and a very fat lady came out who glared at Walter. 'Now then,' said Mother, unbuttoning him and holding him up. Cheers, a crash of music in the distance. 'Hurry up,' said Mother, 'it's the King and Queen.' Suddenly Walter was in tears. 'I can't,' he said. 'Oh, don't be silly!' exclaimed Mother, 'try hard!' 'I can't,' he repeated.

Nor could he, though he could have wept pints. And someone else was rattling the handle. 'Then we'd better go back,' said Mother, very cross, 'if you're quite sure you can't. But don't drag me out again, that's all.'



They had missed the King and Queen, whose carriage stopped for quite a moment opposite the Admiralty. Other carriages with princesses and generals drove by, there were more regiments and bands and soldiers, and then it was all over. And Walter had all the time in the world to go. And now there was no bother about going.

#### BATH

The bathroom lamp had dark circles in the haze; water dribbled down the tile-patterned wall. Goat lay in the bath, staring at his toes, at his navel, at the spry thing in between. Louisa sat by reading the morning paper.

From time to time she sniffed and looked down. 'In two minutes I'll start soaping you.'

What was to be done in those two minutes? On nights when the wind whistled through the ventilator he raised his toe to the draught: when the moon poured a crinkled light over the window he stared at that. Tonight there was neither wind nor moon.

Nothing to do! It was more than he could bear. Holding his nose he slid back into the water till he was quite submerged. There he stayed. Louisa kicked her chair over and brought him up choking.

'Oh my dear life!' she gasped.

At first he was too sick to speak, but then he said: 'If I'd been able to hold my nose, it would have been different.'

## SEUMAS BOY PHELAN

### II—NAUGHTY MANS

You can see Pitstone chimney, from the Oddy Hill where me and Jim lives, along and along and a long way down the hill and across the valley. Bepast that is Ivinghoe Beacon. That's a hill. When me and Jim goes to Arlesey to see Jill, we go on the Luton bus from Tring. You pass Ivinghoe Beacon, and I always call it out. You know you do Seumas Boy. Ivinghoe Beacon, I call out, in case anyone wants to get off and doesn't know the place. And all the peoples says There's a Clever Boy.

Pitstone Chimney is a long way from the Oddy Hill. When the

valley is filled with mist you can't see the chimney, only the smoke. The smoke comes out by the top, and no chimney. That's nice. Once a time Jill was in bed with me. That was nice. If you look at Pitstone Chimney, along and along and a long way across the valley, and if there's no valley but only mist, you see the smoke by myself and that's nice too.

Down the Oddy Hill you can roll, if your Jim isn't too rullied and too much thinking. When your Jim is thinking a lot, about the bloody words he is going to type, that's lousy. Rule one, stay alive. Rule two, don't fool about with your food. Rule three, don't go off the deep end. Your daddy goes off the deep end if you intersturb him when he's writing the bloody words. I made rule three. Jim says There's a Clever Boy.

When I get to be a big man I am going to shoot Jim. Ah, no, Seumas Boy, of course not, your good Jim. So I will though. Once a time two little boys in a film. Nice film too. Better than Jim's. Jim writes words for films, on the typewriter, and he says Boy, Boy, Boy I'm tired. Then he gets drunk and I play with the flour and cabbage leaves and tell stories to Bee and Lory. When Jim gets drunk he always says There's A Good Boy.

Down Fleet Street all the mans say There's A Clever Boy. I have a penny-finder man, from the *Daily Express* and Jock Milligan from *News of the World* and lots. My penny-finder man finds pennies in my shoes and in my curls and in my stapsee trousers. That's nice. I have Tommy Campbell too, from *Express*. He says Jim That Boy's Going To Hit Fleet Street With A Bang One Day. But I am not.

A Jerry plane hit Fleet Street with a bang. That wasn't so good. Harry the barman in the Cheshire Cheese was a big mug. So the bomb came down. So Charlie the waiter was saying Two Din-dins Please, but when the bomb came Charlie ran away. Harry the barman was saying Two Bitters Please and when the bomb came he kept on saying Two Bitters please. Bang! No more Harry. No more Cheshire Cheese. But they mended it. So when it was mended we all went in for Two Bitters Please, and who was there? Charlie the waiter. He saw the bomb and he runned away. There's A Clever Charlie. Rule one, stay alive.

When I get a big man I am going to shoot Jim. Bang! No more Jim. When Jim is writing the words he says Boy, Boy, Boy stop it and don't butt in. Then I say plenty. Then Jim goes off the deep

end. Rule three, don't go off the deep end. Boy made rule three.

Once a time two little boys in a film. Their daddy shouted at them. A big shouting, like Jim does when you intersturb the bloody words. So the two little boys went away. Then they came back by myself, two ones, carrying a gun together. So I said Now They're Going To Shoot Their Daddy. All mans in Tring Flicks laughed big. We saw the film in Tring.

Tring is a lousy town. No sweets. No toyshop like when your Jim takes you up to Fleet Street and you see a toyshop in the Strand. No squirrels nor Jimmyjay in nest. That's the Strand, the place where your daddy says Well Son Where Do You Want To Go. I always say to Donald Duck.

Donald Duck used to be in the Cameo. That's in Charing Cross Road. My little flicks. But it is broke. The bloody bomb came down. Bang! No more Cameo, no more Donald Duck, rule one stay alive. Jill said rule one stay alive, along and along and a long time ago.

Jill is very nice. She kisses you plenty and says Hello Love and takes you in bed. Jill is broked now. That's lousy, because me and Jim lives on the Oddy Hill all by myself. The doctor won't let Jill come home. When I get a big man I shall shoot the doctor.

Me and Jim goes to Arlesey to see Jill, bepast Tring, and bepast Ivinghoe, and bepast Dunstable, and bepast Luton, and bepast Hitchin, and bepast Arlesey. Then you come to the hospital and Jill is in bed and Jim cries and you cry and that's not so good either. When I get a big man I shall shoot all the nurses and let Jill come home. The bomb came down. No more Jill.

There is lots of no more, now. No more choca and sweeties in the shops, because the naughty mans take them. No more Cameo, my little flicks. No more my nice Jill.

Jim makes my din-din now and washes me and puts me to bed. Sometimes he comes in bed and that's nice. But he has to make the bloody words on the typewriter and sometimes you cry. Only a stapsee crying because you are a big boy. But it's lousy if your Jill is broked and your Jim can't come to bed. So you stapsee cry, then you don't intersturb Jim.

Sometimes I tell Jim to cry, and tend he has no mates and no toys and no sweeties. So I come in and tend to be a nice mans. Then when Jim cries I say What's The Matter Son? He says I Have No One To Play With Me. So I say I'll play with you because I am a nice mans.

Once a time I wrote a story. This was about the good no more, when the naughty mans fell out of the plane and the Wolf-of-the-woods ate them up and the bomb broke the wolf. So when I was down Shoe Lane in London I waited until Jim was on the phone. Then I went up the lift to *Picture Post*. Me and Jim has been up lots of times. So the girl said Mr. Picture Post is Out, the liar. I knew he was in all the time. So I got no pennies for the story. It was a nice story too, jolly good I may say. Then I came down in the lift, and out, and a policeman bringed me to Jim.

Policemen are jolly good I may say. They say Hello Curly Where Are You Going? So I say Seumas Boy Phelan, Oddy Hill, Wigginton, Herts, and Jim is in the Cheshire Cheese I think. Then the cop sends some kid along to the Cheshire Cheese with you and you find Jim on the phone and Harry the barman gives you lemonade. But not now because the bomb hit Harry. No more Harry.

\* \* \*

I WILL tell about love.

When your daddy smacks you that gives a bump you bet. It hurts like hell.

This is the layout about love. It gives a bump.

When you have a pieces bump, that hurts like thorns. Then your daddy gets your chamber, or if down the woods you just hide. Then you have a pieces, in the chamber or in the woods. Then the pieces bump is all better. It comes out. No more bump.

This is love too.

For instance if you love your Jim. He gives you kiss and choca and says That's My Big Boy. Then you love. Then he sings Deep River and you love plenty. That's a bump.

For instance if Jill. Jill is very nice and does not cry and says Hello Love. So you have a big bump in tummy. Like a pieces. If you could get it out, that love would be all better. Like a pieces. When my uncle Paul sings a big, on my gramophone, I love lots and seven. It hurts like hell. When sing Deep River and Water Boy. My uncle Paul has black face. That's nice. Like Seumas Boy. Jim says Nice Fella, but it isn't, it is my uncle Paul.

Jim smacked me for not eat din-din. I said I wish I had my Tommy-gun and how can I be like Georgie Washington. Jim said What. Then we had a love. Love and smack and a pieces-bump. It hurts like hell. Seumas Boy does not like love. Too much bump.

Naughty mans in plane and Bloomsbury Blimps does not have bump.

Love is like a pieces. You have a pieces in your chamber, then all better.

Once a time Jim was Doing Proofs. When your daddy is Doing Proofs you must not intersturb. This is very portant. So Seumas Boy made butter marks on proof. My gosh did Jim go off the deep end? So he shout and shout, Boy Boy Boy. I said My Very Sorry Old Chap. Jim gave kiss. Then I love and love. It made Seumas Boy sick.

Love hurts like branch on tummy when no clothes.

Once a time there will be no more love. No bump. That is a good once a time.

I will love my baby when it comes out. This will be a love. What happens is this: when Jim was a stapsee boy, I was inside his chest. Then Jim grew big and a big, and what came out? Seumas Boy. Then I eat plenty of raspberries and rabbit, and have egg in future, so I grow a big and a big. Then what comes out? A baby. That will be my stapsee, and a big love. It will give a bump. Kiss and take night-night, that baby. That's my programme.

This is my programme too. Jill back in this Oddy Hill House, and the war all out, and no more naughty mans and bomb. Then you can have a like, or a love, or a mates-amates. And for instance your daddy will not be preoccupied, when the war is all out, and no more naughty mans. That's my programme.

Other love is when girl with no clothes. That's nice. Girls have legs, and their little chest is bigger than Jim's. It is nice. When I love girl on little chest I lip. Just lip. Jim says Hey, Lip Out. Then I bite it again. I went down the woods with Ro's sister. We played. Legs and little chest. That's nice. Jim gave her smack, and called Little Divil. She is nice, and little chest, and you lip. That is another love, and does not give a bump.

I lip when Jim has bath, and when swim in the canal, bepast Berkhamsted. Jim has little chest, two ones, but not big like girls little chest. So I lip when touch little chest while Jim is drying. I have hair on my legs but none on my tummy, and I have stapsee little chest, two ones. This is another love. No bump, but nice.

Best love is snail. This is not snail with house on back, but a

black one, with no house. You hide down the wellie, and what comes out? Black snail, with no house. He walks and walks, a stapsee, down the path. Then you pick him up, because I do love him so. When lots of black snail with no house, Jim is a big angry when you go home. Because you do not want any din-din. That is a good love.

Love is a smell, two ones. Nice smell, but not so too good either.

The best love-smell is when your Jill takes you in bed. This is the best love-smell. Or when you find Jill's clothes, upstairs in the Oddy Hill House. Then it is Jill again, and Seumas Boy laughs and laughs. Then you say where's Jill. But you know, don't you Seumas Boy? Broked, and the naughty doctor won't let her come home. Hospital stinks. That is not love.

I do not like Sunday. Because there is no Teddy-bear story in the *Daily Express*. You go to a place, this is a church. It stinks. Like lots of mans in bed and lav. And on Sunday is no shop. And on Sunday cannot see Jill.

We got another London House, forcross the London house that was broked. Now Jill will come back. I want Jill back in this new London house, because we did not get a mammy girl forcross Jill. For instance if typewriter break, or tøy trains, mans can get another forcross that, but not your Jill. This is why you do not love typewriter and trains but only a like.

Once a time we were having tea with two chorus-girls. This is from the Coliseum, in Saint Martin's Lane, a jolly nice place I may say if you can get your Jim to take you. Now I liked the look of these girls' faces, and gave kiss. They were very beautiful. With blue all round eyes.

I gave a secret whisper to Jim—why do they put blue all round eyes? Jim said it is to make them look nice.

This is the explain: a Coliseum is a theatre. You pay a penny and go in by the front. Then the dancing-girls go in by the other door, from the café and pub, and come out on the stage. This is the back. Then they dance, and have nice blue eyes and legs and little chest. So all mans says Jolly Good Show. Then they go out in the café again.

In course I sicked out.

Because Jim gave me soup and milk-pudding, and *they* had salami. For instance salami is Jolly Good for boys. I had some, with Wil Dickins, while Jim was on the phone.

When I sicked out Jim said: that's done it. So he would not let the chorus-girls give kiss and say Ah the poor little thing. Wicked Jim. Then we went out. He said—no pigeons.

Now this is not so good, if your Jim is angry and you want the pigeons. Because I love the pigeons in Trafalgar Square. They can say. Not like silly boys. When Seumas Boy comes, all millions and millions and millions of pigeons fly to him. Then have mates-amates. Then talk. So in Saint Martin's Lane Jim said—no pigeons.

There we go, two ones, walking along Saint Martin's Lane, having a big angry. Jim did not say. I did not say. We just walked. But you don't see Seumas Boy crying you bet. There's a good Lory. Lory comes along and along beside me, and says—don't cry Seumas Boy.

Then I said to Jim: how can we get back into Mates again? He said I don't know son. Then I had a big sad, and cried a stapsee, and cried a big. So I said: Ah please Jim how can we get back into Mates again? Jim said—You were very naughty to sick out; that was deliberate Seumas Boy. Deliberate means if you say to myself first.

So I said all right then. I did not cry, and I said all right then—let's go on fighting until Jill comes back, and I have a Shafto book for my mate. Then Jim gave kiss and we were back into Mates again and he took me to my pigeons.

This was very beautiful. I like mates.

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ALL mans write a sing. If they know something nice. When a mans has very beautiful things for myself, he writes a sing. Or good places. Or good story either. For instance the Mountains of Mourne, and the Great North Road, and Shenandoa, and very deep river rolling along. For instance these has a sing. And Kelly the Boy from Killann. And Great North Road. Me and Jim wrote that sing, and jolly good I may say. It is a big wide clean road, hooge with lorries and cars. Very beautiful.

This is why you have a sing, for instance about the Mountains of Mourne roll down to the sea. Because it is so jolly nice, and better than a say or an explain. For instance if mans say where is the Cheshire Cheese you give an explain, it is down Fleet Street.

But if you go in a Green Liner, along and along and a long way



on the Great North Road, bepast Hatfield and Hitchin and Arlesey, to see your Jill, that is not an explain you bet.

You sing. This is your sing—along the North Road and a long North Road, going to see My Mother. Hurry along and hurry along, going to see My Mother. This is your sing. While the coach is going along.

When horrid very horrible nasty things, too, there is a sing. This makes you cry sometimes, but it is a jolly good sing I say. Poor Cock Robin, this is very sad: some naughty mans shot, bang, and died and killed and broke, like a bomb in house. You cry, then all better. Tramp, tramp is a sad sing, about naughtys, because it gives a say you will never see your mammy any more. This makes sad.

And Loch Lomond. This makes sad. Mans cried. The wireless gave a sing, my true love will never meet again. Bo cried. And my Auntie Pat, because Uncle Jock gave that sing in Greekse. The Nazis killed Jock in Greekse, the bastards, and all Jock mans and mates gave sing, me and my true love will never meet again. In Greekse. Because the Naughty mans killed them. No more Jock.

My sad sing is: Seumas Boy has no good mates, ah poor Seumas Boy, his Jill is gone a long long way, ah poor Seumas Boy. This is my sad sing. And when Jim will not tell story.

For nice things you make a sing. And for sad things man writes a sing too. And for horrid things. Because you might get nice things forcross the horrid things. For instance wicked giants and horrid tigers. And naughty mans.

But there is no sing about the naughty mans.

Once a time I told Jim my Shoe Lane cafe was broked. Jim said: soon all better. But it *was* broked. No more cafe. Bits of mans and stapsee bleed and bits of brick.

Ah poor Seumas Boy, where is your nice cafe? Gan. Ah poor Seumas Boy, where is your little Shoe Lane House? Gan. Where is your nice mans in lift, poor Seumas Boy? All gan. I said to Jim: write a sing about Shoe Lane. But he was too busy. He did not write a sing about the bits of brick and mans. You could smell them. There's a wicked Jim. No sing.

Now for the love of mike. Now in comes all my mates, and jolly good, my hooge writer-mates. For instance Tom Wintringham and George Orwell and Tee Jay and Stephen Spender

and Andre Malraux and Mulk Anand and my Fleet Street mans and Tom Wintringham. And Jim is the bestest writer of all and all, because Jim is my daddy. But where is the sing about the naughty mans? That's the snag.

\* \* \*

I made sing, two ones, about my broke house, when smell like bacon and mans said Oh, and stapsee boy, and Jill not open eyes. Jim said stop. So I stopped.

But I made that sing again you bet, down the woods, and tell Bee and Lory. Lory said it is a jolly good sing, and not stop. Bee said a jolly good sing and not stop. Now Jimmyjay flied away, when I told him my broke house sing. And Jicker. Jicker said like this: I am very frightened Seumas Boy. Then he runned away. So after he came back and licked Seumas Boy on face. This is when Jicker says My Very Sorry Old Chap.

\* \* \*

Now you see Jim working at his typewriter one night. And who sneaked out? Seumas Boy, while Jim was making the words. This is very black in the woods, but a stapsee moon up in the sky, going along and along. Now who came up the path and said hello and lick face? Jicker. So we went a walk down by Red Riding Hood's house.

All stapsee rabbits give thump on ground and run away down the Elber when we come. These bats hit your face, and naughty owl screaming and screaming: Go away you wicked Jicker and Seumas Boy. There was snow too, and a badger rolled in it, and two deer played gee-gees around a tree.

Now Jicker stopped and said for instance: Come home Seumas Boy. So I did not go. Then he stopped, and made a stapsee sad. He said Oh. Now who comed up the path? A girl. This was very beautiful. Like Jill. Jicker hid in the Elber bushes and did not say hello. This very beautiful said Hello Love.

Now it was black in the woods, because the moon was gone night-night. Seumas Boy could not see the beautiful. But he could smell her. And very nice. I gave kiss. This very beautiful said Bless You. Jicker gave sad, out loud. Then she went up the path and me and Jicker went home.

I said to Jim: What is bless you? He said it means good boy. Now all a nights and all a nights if I waken up I give Jim kiss

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and say Bless You. This is what the very beautiful ghost said when I was out in the snow. Jim says Bless you boy.

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If all the houses in London gets broked that will be jolly good. I mean, not some. All the lot. Then where will the peoples live? In Wigginton for instance. This is better, for peoples. Lots and seven houses is silly.

Now you see ancient vergers where is lots and seven houses. All ancient verger, saying nyah nyah. I mean, that's silly. In Oddy Hill woods is only one ancient verger, not lots. Then silly boys, two ones and more and lots. They say wah.

For instance a silly boy says like this to his daddy: What's books made of? His daddy says like this: Paper. Then he says What's books made of? His daddysays Paper. Then he says What's books made of? His daddy says Paper. Did you ever hear such nonsense, Seumas Boy? The lots and seven houses make them silly.

Once a time Jim put me in a London house while he went down Fleet Street. Now here is two boys. Mallin and Chris. I said good-morning. Now they looked with their eyes.

Now we came to play. Mallin cried. I mean, a big boy, six, and cried. And what was his cry? He could not catch the ballee. He runned too stapsee. Oh-ee-oh, Seumas Boy does not run stapsee you bet. Now we saw a tree with apples. I said let's have din-din. They looked with their eyes. Did you ever hear such nonsense, Seumas Boy? Not able to climb a tree. Curly could do better. That's me.

Chris cried, a big. He tried to get up the tree, and Crash There She Goes, plunk. I sniggered. Now up comes the big. And only a stapsee bit up, then wah-wah and who came out? His mammy, and lift him down and give kiss. Now kiss for whine in tree is very silly. I gave his mammy apples.

I had a shilling. Jim gave it. For sweetie, or maybe toy. So we had sweetie. Now what does Mallin do, big mug? He tried to take mine. Ho, ho, that Mallin, he didn't have a dog's chance. Now he gives push-over and try to crown Seumas Boy. What did he get? Bite. Now he hits. Then he gets straight left, two ones, like boxer teaches. Ho, ho. Then whine and give kick. Now what does that whine boy get? Kick in pee-pee. Then I took back

my sweetie. So I said: My Very Sorry, now all mates again. So we were mates.

His mammy gave a secret whisper to other girl. Now who heard that secret whisper? Seumas Boy. She said: A little terror. From the country. The country means for instance the Oddy Hill. Now if all the houses of London was broked all mans and boys would live in the country. Better, then all boys could be a little terror and not silly. And no whine.

I hate silly peoples. The houses does it.

If they see a boy in Fleet Street for instance, over comes an ancient verger and say: Are you lost, poor little boy? Now I am a big boy, and not poor, and not lost neither. That ancient verger would be lost you bet. But they won't let you alone, thinking they are posh clever. They are silly. That ancient verger would be afraid of a lift you bet. That ancient verger could not call a taxi you bet. Saying: Are you lost poor little boy? Mugs. In course your Jim is on the phone.

Taximans is jolly clever, but some not. Once a time I call a taxi in Fleet Street. I said: Chez Nina. The man said what. He said where is Mister Phelan. I said: Chez Nina, go ahead. Now he fetched me along and along. To where? To Jim. Jim gave him a shilling. The liar said I was lost in Fleet Street. That should be my shilling. Because I only wanted to go to Chez Nina to see my nice girls.

Once a time I met a lovely girl. In a Tube. Blackfriars. This is when you go to the City on business. Now this was the nicest and the nicest girl in all hills. Her eyes was up to Seumas Boy's eyes, and had curls like Seumas Boy, and nice daddy and mammy. She said: I like you. I said: Hello, I like you. Then she gave sweetie. Now I gave an explain about the tube. It is under the ground. She said: You are nice boy. So her mammy gave orange. Jolly good I may say.

This girl had blue eyes, but not blue all round like a chorus-girl, and stapsee frock, and clean legs and nice smell. I smelled her and she was nice. She said: Let's play. So we played the tube-train was a hoooge ship. Jim and her daddy talked a big, I think they were mates-a-mates. Then the tube came to Liverpool Street and we got out.

Seumas Boy did not cry.

But that was a naughty Jim to take me out. I said: Let's go on;

this is my sister. He said portant business. It *was* my sister too. Then the train went away and away and she was gan.

If she comes back Seumas Boy will be glad. She is not silly and does not look with her eyes and does not say wah-what. This is my special girl and I will bring her down my woods night-night to be my sister.

Now why cannot all girls be like that? And all boys like Simon for instance. Simon lives in Bovingdon and his doctor is a daddy-doctor. And nice.

But all and all the rest is silly. This is sad.

I said to Jim: Why is not all girls like my tube girl? Jim gave an explain but it was not much. You know it was not much, you wicked Jim. He said they are. He said all boys and girls is nice. They are not.

Why is Ro? And Lem? And Saul Read? That's the snag. I think maybe perhaps it is because they have no nice mammy. Such as Jill for instance. And good mates-daddy. Such as Jim. But I like Jill best. Jim says all boys and girls is nice but naughty mans make them not nice. That is not much, that explain. The ancient verger in the Green Liner said Pih and Puh. Me and Jim winked at us, two ones. She got out in Berkhamsted, where Jill did not open eyes.

Then we get off at the bottom of the Oddy Hill. Now it is no houses, only trees and the woods wall. This road goes up. It is a stapsee. Then along the bend, bepast the hole and heap, where the stapsee rabbits hide. Now up the short cut. Seumas Boy gets a little tired, so I have gee-gee on Jim's back. Jim says Huh and Huh on that short cut. The hill is hooqe.

Now along and along the Top Common, and you are nearly up. Jimmyjay gives an explain. This is his explain: Hello Seumas Boy I thought you were gan. You Rat peeps over the woods wall, but he does not say. He sees Jim. Now over the Commons Hill and you are up.

You can see a big down and a big down, to the London Road, with all my Green Line drivers and lorries and they give sing. Then you can see bepast Ivinghoe Beacon, and bepast Dunstable, where we go when we go to see Jill. This valley has no mist. And who is at my Oddy Hill gate? Jicker. He says: Love.

Now a stapsee play with Jicker, and we tend a big angry, and I give smack and he gives bite, then all mates again. On the

stapsee stove Jim makes tea, and we have that and Jicker gats bits. Then shout Woo-oo to Jimmyjay and in. I have wash. Now Seu-mas Boy gets a little tired, and Jim will make the words. First sing Shenandoa, then bed.

Thursday tomorrow, keep in woods. After that Friday, keep in Fleet Street. But what's after that? This is a lovely explain. After that is Saturday. Then bepast Dunstable and Luton and Hitchin, to see Jill. She is My Mother.

This is my prayers: Jill back in this house, and the war all out, and nice mans give sing, and Jim not rullied. This is my prayers too: no more naughty mans, to kill stapsee boy and break your Mother.

Then all better.

Night-night.

## PETER QUENNEL

# BOSWELL'S PROGRESS—III

To wish to be loved is the commonest of human failings. Less common is an ability to repay affection with affection. But both traits were present in Boswell's character; and, though it is true that he clamoured for love and, noisily demanded notice, his response to friendship was always immediate, and the return he made so profuse as to be sometimes overwhelming. He was an enthusiast—that was his strength and, ultimately, his downfall. With the curious sensitiveness for which even his admirers did not often give him credit, Johnson, on one occasion, seeing his friend particularly despondent, told Boswell that he had recently heard him described as 'a man whom everybody likes'. And was there more, he demanded, that life could give? For Boswell, at least, there could be no greater happiness. With Johnson, and in Johnson's circle, he had achieved perhaps the highest form of human satisfaction—he had arrived, that is to say, at an almost complete balance between his talents and his opportunities: he was perfectly situated to do what he was qualified to do best. Thus it came about that Johnson's death in 1784 was a catastrophe from which he never quite recovered. Henceforward, however lively his friendships or however tumultuous his enthusiasms, there was always a residue of romantic enthusiasm, human

affection, intellectual veneration, for which he could not find employment. In Johnson's company—under Johnson's influence when they happened to live apart—he was contented and secure. He might not take the excellent advice that 'Ursa Major' offered him and might persevere, obstinately and cheerfully, in exactly the opposite course; but Johnson could absorb—such was his majestic egotism—every particle of interest his companion could supply. Johnson gone, Boswell was embarrassed by his own interior wealth which he longed to invest worthily yet squandered casually, without a plan or a ruling passion to guide his spending. Life which, during the whole period of his association with Johnson, had worn the romantic colouring of hope and self-esteem—the latter being for Boswell the equivalent of self-respect—seemed progressively darker, stranger and more chaotic as he advanced through middle age.

Suddenly he felt the resurgent symptoms of an old and dreaded disease. Johnson, himself a life-long sufferer, had given him shrewd advice as to how it might be combated. For a time Boswell imagined hopefully that the threat had been beaten off. Now hypochondria again declared itself, and a nameless, formless depression descended on his spirit. But, in Boswell's case, the disease was not accompanied by any cessation of activity. Rather, in the search for relief, he grew busier, more talkative, spasmodically and superficially more ebullient. He was still—or still believed himself to be—the man whom everybody liked; but no longer was he quite sure of the position he occupied. It became more and more difficult to remember next morning what he had said at dinner: the hours that followed had usually melted into a vague alarming haze: and the little that he remembered seemed often best forgotten. Yet his love of activity, his thirst for movement, did not diminish. Ambition glowed in the bosom of the indefatigable diner-out. A year after Johnson's death, in 1785, against the advice of his friends and notwithstanding the pleas of Mrs. Boswell, whose health was then giving him grounds for serious anxiety, he threw up his Scottish practice and determined that he would be called to the Bar in London. The plan did not succeed. Neither on circuit nor in Westminster Hall did his assiduity bring him in a single brief. Next, he aspired to Parliament. Lord Lonsdale, the owner of no less than nine pocket boroughs, should nominate him to a safe Tory seat. Lord



Lonsdale must be courted; and, when Boswell courted, he courted with abandon. The methods he adopted were seldom discreet or dignified. The magnate, it is true, consented after some pestering to take him on, appointed him to the Recordership of Carlisle, employed him in one somewhat discreditable transaction and destined him for others. With regard to Boswell's candidacy he proved considerably less obliging; and presently it came to his henchman's ears that Lonsdale, in his abrupt and brutal manner, had remarked that, were he to put him up, Boswell undoubtedly would 'get drunk and make a foolish speech'. . . . Boswell was bitterly offended—all the more offended because he may have admitted that this cruel forecast had a certain inherent probability. Even so, he did not revolt. He submitted to the affront as he had submitted to the practical jokes at Lowther, where Lonsdale's friends had stolen his wig and he had been 'obliged to go all day in my nightcap', till he could drive into Carlisle and get another fitted. And when his patron commanded his presence at Carlisle elections, though he protested that his attendance was quite unnecessary and explained at vast length the extreme inconvenience to which he would be subjected if he were obliged to leave London, with much grumbling and many secret pangs he prepared to set forth.

The journey was postponed: it was postponed again. Lord Lonsdale was capricious, Boswell sulky. Tempers were tried: the situation on both sides grew more and more explosive: then Lonsdale burst forth into a downright rage, blurted out that he supposed Boswell thought he had meant to bring him into Parliament but he had never had any such intention, and 'in short . . . expressed himself in the most degrading manner, in the presence of a low man from Carlisle and one of his menial servants'. Exposed to 'such unexpected, insulting behaviour', and deprived at a blow of all the hopes of fortune and preferment he had carefully been nursing, Boswell 'almost sank', yet rallied sufficiently to embark for Carlisle in his patron's carriage. At Barnet, where they paused on the road, there was another appalling scene. Some unfortunate complaint by Boswell raised Lord Lonsdale's passion 'almost to madness', so that he addressed his fellow-traveller in 'shocking' terms. 'You have kept low company all your life', he vociferated. 'What are *you*, Sir?' A gentleman, replied Boswell, and a man of honour; at which Lonsdale

agreed to give him satisfaction, but refused to lend him pistols, obliging Boswell to wander round Barnet in search of weapons and a second, before his anger had begun to evaporate and he crept back dejectedly into Lonsdale's presence, to be roughly placated and told to forget and forgive. . . .

Our authority for this tragi-comic narrative is not, as might have been supposed, some malicious friend or gossiping acquaintance who happened to be present. It is Boswell himself; for, even at his most dejected, a kind of queer lucidity never quite deserted him; and, while his wounds were still smarting and his head still ached, he sat down to his journal to record the humiliating story of his private misadventures. He had got drunk again. That, of course, had happened often enough at happier periods—it had occurred, indeed, under the very eyes of Dr. Johnson; but Boswell's spells of nocturnal sobriety nowadays were growing more and more infrequent. He loved wine, and the glow of companionship that wine promoted. More decisive perhaps, he was an extraordinarily restless man. At a certain stage of the evening, the restlessness that gnawed at him became intolerable and—with no Johnson to lead him off on a stroll down Fleet Street, concluding virtuously but agreeably over Mrs. Williams' teacups—he launched out, flushed and excited, into the mazes of nocturnal London. Sometimes he resisted temptation and returned to his own house; but, once he had arrived there, the impulse he had controlled came tumultuously flooding back and he would wheel round and rush out again, to seize what the occasion offered. There was a dreadful night when, like the drunkard's child in some improving moral story, his schoolboy son had followed him into the street and pleaded with the much-intoxicated Boswell to remain at home. There were other occasions when he had fallen in the mud, been severely bruised by tipsy tumbling, and had his pocket picked; and that unfortunately was not the sum total of the harm he did himself: from the after-effects of his random amatory adventures he was seldom completely free.

Was ever man more unhappy, he demanded frequently and passionately, in the long miserable out-pourings he despatched to Temple. Mrs. Boswell, affectionate, ill-used, devoted woman,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Of Boswell's wife, Johnson wrote to Mrs. Thrale in his concise yet circuitous style: 'Mrs. Boswell has the mien and manner of a gentlewoman;

had died of a consumption in 1789; and with bitter remorse her husband recollected how 'often and often when she was very ill in London have I been indulging in festivity with Sir Joshua Reynolds, Courtenay, Malone, &c. &c. &c., and have come home late, and disturbed her repose. Nay, when I was last at Archinleck on purpose to soothe and console her, I repeatedly went from home and both on those occasions, and when neighbours visited me, drank a great deal too much wine'. Three years later, he continued to grieve—intermittently it is true—for the companion he had lost. 'I get bad rest in the night' (he wrote to Temple on April 2nd 1791) 'and then I brood over all my complaints—the *sickly mind* which I have had from my early years—the disappointment of my hopes of success in life—the irrevocable separation between me and that excellent woman who was my cousin, my friend, and my wife—the embarrassment of my affairs—the disadvantage to my children in having so wretched a father—nay, the want of *absolute certainty* of being happy after death, the *sure prospect* of which is *frightful*. No more of this.' Yet the old flighty exuberant Boswell had not been extinguished; and the same letter that presents this melancholy chronicle of anxieties and apprehensions includes a reference to the project he had just formed of marrying a Miss Bagnal, 'who may probably have six or seven hundred a year . . . about seven and twenty, lively and gay, a *Ranelagh girl*, but of excellent principles, in so much that she reads prayers to the servants in her father's family, every Sunday evening. "Let me see such a woman," cried I; and accordingly, I am to see her. She has refused young and fine gentlemen. "Bravo," cried I. We see then what her taste is. Here now, my Temple, I am my fluttering self. . . .'

The flutterings, the agitations, the recurrent bursts of gaiety and self-esteem, never quite subsided. There were delightful dinner-parties, gratifying encounters, further plots to marry—Miss Bagnal was succeeded by 'Miss Milles, daughter of the late Dean of Exeter, a most agreeable woman *d'une certaine âge* . . . with a fortune of £10,000'. Or he appeared at Court, and 'was the *great man* (as we used to say) . . . in a suit of imperial blue

and such a person and mind as would not be in any place either admired or contemned. She is in a proper degree inferior to her husband: she cannot rival him; nor can he ever be ashamed of her.' To her credit, she seems never to have been ashamed of Boswell.

lined with rose-coloured silk, and ornamented with rich gold-wrought buttons'. The confidence he felt in himself, however, had now largely evaporated: Boswell's existence, after Johnson's death, it is customary to observe, was gloomy, sordid and unprofitable. Boswell's most recent biographer, indeed, has gone to the length of suggesting that, during the latter part of his life, he was actually mad; but no evidence can be produced for this odd hypothesis; and there is little indication of distraction or derangement in the uninterrupted lucidity of his private papers. It is certain that he was weak, dissipated and unhappy; but (thanks to his gift of candid exposition) there is a kind of universality about Boswell's weakness, and he becomes, not a great tragic, but undoubtedly a great typical, figure. He stands for every man who has sat up late, while a nervous and ailing wife expected him at home; who has made noble resolutions he was conscious he could not keep, in the muddled hope that at least to have made them would prove somehow its own reward: who has groaned over his past life and shuddered at future prospects: who has felt his youth slipping away from him, yet admitted that, though age has cost him much, it has taught him little: who has hurried out and got cheerfully drunk, to wake up in a welter of cheerless thoughts and disturbing recollections.

Yet the man who detailed his miseries to Temple in 1791, added casually that his *Life of Johnson* was 'at last drawing to a close. I am correcting the last sheet, and have only to write an Advertisement, to make out a list of Errata, and to correct a second sheet of contents . . .' The work was certainly projected before Johnson's death and probably begun during the early months of 1785, when Boswell, having completed his manuscript of the *Tour to the Hebrides* (published that autumn), wrote to a member of Johnson's acquaintances, soliciting material. Thenceforward, it struggled on by slow and laborious stages. In January 1789, he informed Temple that he was now 'very near the conclusion of my rough draught'; but there had been many occasions, he added in a letter written during November of the same year, when he had thought of giving it up. 'You cannot imagine what labour, what perplexity, what vexation I have endured in arranging a prodigious multiplicity of materials, in supplying omissions, in searching for papers, buried in different masses—and all this besides the exertion of composing and polishing.' Any author

knows the agony of such prolonged endeavour, how often hope is succeeded by desperation, and desperation by disgust, how insistently, now and then, a positive nausea for every sentence he has composed presses on his spirit. And Boswell's life at this period was more than usually unsettled. There were his fruitless efforts to gain a foothold among the advocates of Westminster Hall and, for a time, there were the demands made by the outrageous Lonsdale who dragged him away from his proofs to attend to legal jobbery. Sometimes his hand was so unsteady that it proved extremely difficult to mark on the proof sheets the corrections he required. But, through all this, he was sustained by a belief in the book's potential value and by the complete trust he continued to put in the plan he had adopted. '... Though I shall be uneasily sensible' (he declared to Temple) 'of its many deficiencies, it will certainly be to the world a very valuable and peculiar volume of biography, full of literary and characteristical anecdotes...' And elsewhere: 'I am absolutely certain that *my* mode of biography, which gives not only a *history* of Johnson's *visible* progress through the world, and of his publications, but a *view* of his mind, in his letters and conversations, is the most perfect that can be conceived, and will be *more* of a *Life* than any work that has ever yet appeared.'

His judgment was, of course, correct. Not only did the *Life of Johnson*, when it at last emerged on the 16th of May 1791, set a wholly new standard in the art of modern biography, but it forecast a new, larger and more ambitious method in the treatment of individual human beings as the raw material of literature. The clear, hard, definitive strokes, with which Walton or Johnson himself had built up their portraits, pre-supposed a view of human character as of something largely static, composed of attributes that could be described in a few words, and of virtues and failings easy to harmonize in a concerted moral scheme. Here Boswell's observation of his own character, pursued so patiently since he first began to keep a journal at the age of eighteen, may be assumed to have had very great importance in the task he had undertaken of anatomizing Johnson. Human beings were *not* consistent: in the study of his own life, he had remarked that vices and virtues, talents and disabilities, were closely interleaved. No single generalization could resume a temperament: one must allow both for Johnson's brutality and

his kindness: his energy and his sloth: his strength of mind and the vein of weakness that exposed him to the horde of nervous terrors by which he was perpetually surrounded: his enjoyment of life and his pervading melancholy. To delineate so complex a personage, one could not depend on the frank outlines, bold colouring and formalized background, hitherto adopted by contemporary biographers. One must show Johnson so far renouncing his prejudices and principles as to be won over by Wilkes at a London dinner-party: must display him, as a genial eccentric, 'buffeting' his books among clouds of dust and feeding his cat on oysters: or reveal him, in an uproariously convivial mood, with hands 'not over-clean'<sup>1</sup> squeezing lemons into a bowl and demanding: 'Who's for *poonsh*?'

Over the strange rugged landscape of Johnson's character—fertile valleys hemmed in between frowning mountain-walls of prejudice and superstition, uplands of serene intelligence which gave place to wild volcanic regions where obscure and terrible shapes moved through a perpetual gloom—Boswell's scrutiny travels in lively insect-leaps. The prospect seems all the larger because Boswell is so small. Without question he was a conceited, but he was never an arrogant, man: false pride did not stand in his way when he desired to achieve an effect: complete candour was the goal he had nobly set himself. The truth was always worth relation, ran his splendid if vague belief: the truth about human nature is always dignifying, though at a first glance it may seem undignified and even squalid: there is a tragic beauty in the *whole* truth that no degree of decorative evasion can ever supplant or conceal. Thus Boswell, in common with Rousseau, the 'genteel, black man' whom he had met at Motiers, anticipated those heroic attempts at dispassionate self-portrayal which bulk large in the literature of nineteenth-century Europe. He is one of the first English writers to be more interested in himself, as a text for minute critical examination, than in the impression that he made, and to be less concerned with style than with the fascination of his subject. Such an approach has its disadvantages. We may argue that Gibbon's aestheticism tells us as much as—perhaps more than—Boswell's realism: that Gibbon's elegant

<sup>1</sup> This detail was later suppressed at the instance of Edmond Malone, the distinguished Shakespearian commentator, who encouraged Boswell to finish his book and in whose 'elegant study' he did much of his revision.

circumlocution, while he is unfolding his life-story, traces as fine and as authentic a pattern as Boswell's unashamed directness. Both, however, are now an inseparable part of the literary tradition to which we have been born; and of the two it is probably Boswell who has had the greater original influence. By conviction he was a conservative, by disposition a revolutionary; and Boswell's attitude towards the material he handled is far ahead of his time. In the *Life*, it is true, his revelation of himself may be sometimes inadvertent, but in the *Journals* ('my curious archives', as he called them, which, if he did not intend them for publication, were certainly destined by their author for the instruction of posterity) he set out with the idea of preparing a full-length self-portrait, which would embody, so far as he could, all those elements in his composition that puzzled or delighted him. He did not claim to have conducted his life well; but he could assert at least that, whatever he had done, he had done with wide-open eyes. 'You have told me' (he wrote to Temple in 1789) 'that I was the most *thinking* man you ever knew. It is certainly so as to my *own life*. I am continually *conscious*, continually *looking back* or *looking forward* and wondering how I shall feel in situations which I anticipate in fancy. My *journal* will afford materials for a very curious narrative.'

Alas, when he achieved victory by the publication of his *magnum opus*, so far as happiness and peace of mind were concerned he had already lost the battle. His book was well-timed but came too late to save him; and, though he certainly relished success<sup>1</sup> and responded to the praise of his friends—Jack Wilkes had said it was 'a wonderful book', and Boswell, characteristically, wrote to beg that he would put his opinion down in writing that he might 'have your *testimonium* in my archives at Auchinleck'—his triumph could do little to heal the wounds inflicted by experience. Three years after the publication of the *Life*, he was once again as tormented and as despondent as in the days when he was still struggling with his proof sheets and fighting off Lord Lonsdale. He was well aware, he told his

<sup>1</sup>Boswell's financial profits on the book are thought to have amounted to between two and three thousand pounds. A second edition appeared in 1793; but it was not until the publication of the sixth, edited by Croker, in 1831, that the *Life* became a recognized best-seller. Previous sales, though steady, had not been sensationally large; and, tempering the applause, there was much contemporary criticism of Boswell's alleged indiscretion and disloyalty.



brother, that he could now expect 'only temporary alleviation of misery; and some gleams of enjoyment. But these it is my *right*, nay I think my *duty* to have.' In other words, he refused to remain at Auchinleck. Prudence suggested that he should reside on his estates, save money and lead the life of a cultured country gentleman. But always London beckoned him, with its noise and company; there was always the hope that some public man might recognize his merit; and, as a last effort, he wrote to Dundas in 1794, begging that the Secretary of State would appoint him Commissioner Plenipotentiary to a liberated Corsica. The appointment went, however, to Sir Gilbert Elliot; for Boswell's reputation as a responsible personage was now beyond repair; and the only result was another failure to add to a lengthening list. Desperately he sought refuge in crowded urban scenes—'as London' (he had reflected) 'is the best place when one is happy, it is equally so when one is the reverse . . .'; but the daily allowance of wine he had for several months adhered to while he was finishing his book—'four good glasses at dinner, and a pint after it'—had gone the way, long ago, of many other salutary resolutions, and the effect of his nocturnal rambles grew more and more demoralizing. Worse still, he suffered from the pangs of solitude. A number of old friends had vanished; new acquaintances treated him with less indulgence; 'his joke, his song, his sprightly effusions of wit and wisdom' (observed the author of a critical but not unkindly obituary notice) 'were ready, but did not appear to possess upon all occasions their wonted power of enlivening social joy. . . . Convivial society became continually more necessary to him, while his power of enchantment over it continued to decline.' Now that the book had left him, and had embarked upon that independant existence which is the lot of masterpieces, assuming new colours and gaining new interest as the decades go by, the man who had produced it began to stumble and falter. James Boswell died after a brief illness at his house in Great Portland Street, in his fifty-fifth year, on 19 May 1795.

*Note.*—In writing the series of articles on James Boswell, of which this is the third, the author has been much indebted to the magnificent edition of Boswell's private papers produced by the late Geoffrey Scott and Professor Pottle of Yale, and to Professor Tinker's edition of Boswell's *Letters*. These essays are to form part of a book on the second half of the English eighteenth century now in course of preparation.

D. MARTENS

# THE POET AND THE REVOLUTION

THE news of Mayakovsky's suicide reached us, a small quasi-illegal group of Left Wing writers in an East European country, only a few weeks after we had had the poet as our guest in our midst. We were depressed and bewildered. . . . Suicide was anathema to our revolutionary code of behaviour. The revolutionary's duty was to live in order to struggle. This seemed so plain and elementary a truth that Mayakovsky's sudden 'withdrawal from the battlefield' was in our eyes almost a blasphemy. But it was more than that—it was a disturbing enigma. Here he had sat with us, bursting with energy, enthusiasm and sarcasm, only a few weeks ago. He drew before our eyes the grandiose prospects of that second year of the first Five Year Plan. He recited his latest verses on industrialisation at the top of his overwhelming metallic voice; that voice without whose sound his poems may be read and perhaps understood, but not *heard* and felt. The ring of that unique voice was still in our ears. The *élan* of his gestures was still before our eyes. His untamable tall and massive figure still stood in front of us. We searched our memories and recalled the details of the days spent with him. Not a trace could we find of that hidden worm that must already have gnawed his heart while he was with us. Not even the slightest doubt seemed to have clouded his thoughts. Not once did moral weariness seem to have crept into his mind and mood. . . . And yet suicide *was* petty-bourgeois cowardice. It was an act of capitulation which could spring only from faint-hearted and weak-kneed pessimism. It spelt unworthy dread of life. . . . But was Mayakovsky a coward? Was *he* poisoned with pessimism and fear?

—'Impossible.'—

But the 'impossible' was a fact. The details of the poet's erotic life which had been given as the motives of his suicide appeared to us trivial and unconvincing. We had been trained to look to the social background hidden behind the personal motives of human deeds. Soviet historians of literature used

ironically to dismiss the accepted explanations of the deaths of the greatest poets of old Russia—Pushkin and Lermontov. The romantic personal motives, they said, had been nothing but the immediate reasons for their quasi-suicides. The deeper cause was the stifling atmosphere of the Tsarist autocracy which had left no scope for the poets' urge and which had impelled them to seek an escape in adventures and duels. Both Pushkin and Lermontov were mercilessly drowned by the moral and political squalor of their epoch.

Somebody hinted at the analogy. Surely, Mayakovsky's sense of solidarity with the new revolutionary community must have been sapped or weakened if personal frustrations could have prevailed over it. And the disquieting question emerged: why did death through virtual or actual suicide rob Russia of her best poets after the revolution just as it had done before the revolution? Mayakovsky's was not the first suicide. A few years earlier Yesienin had chosen the same path to nothingness. What was the fate that hung over both of them? The question mark was drawn; but none of us would answer it. None of us would let his doubts take on the definite shape of words. . . . It seemed so obviously nonsensical to draw a comparison between Stalin and Nicolas the First.

\*                      \*                      \*

To formulate the question along that line was certainly rather too narrow. It was not only Mayakovsky's death—his life, too, was stamped with tragedy. Mayakovsky's poetry has remained as the unconscious testimony to a great and very painful *qui pro quo*, which occurred between the poet and the Revolution. The suicide was hardly more than an epilogue which threw the problem into sharper relief. The problem itself has by far surpassed the poet's personal fate. It bears on the rôle of the poet amid the convulsions and changes of our age. It is connected directly with what might be called the social homelessness of modern poetry.

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It is futile to portray Mayakovsky as the orthodox, perfect Communist or—as his English translator puts it<sup>1</sup>—as 'the poet who expressed in his work the vast gamut of the Socialist Revolution'.

<sup>1</sup>All the Mayakovsky verses in this article are quoted from 'Mayakovsky and his Poetry', compiled by Herbert Marshall (The Pilot Press, 2s. 6d.)

True, almost at the threshold of his poetical life Mayakovsky wrote:

I,  
jeered at by tribal contemporaries,  
like a lanky  
discarded rhyme,  
see that which nobody sees,  
coming over the mountains of time.

There where man's cut short of vision  
by the heads of the hungry that surge,  
in the thorny crown of revolution  
I see nineteen sixteen emerge.

Thus, the anticipation of the revolution coloured Mayakovsky's poetical vision at a very early stage. It would not do justice to his artistic sincerity to suggest that the 'thorny crown of revolution' was merely a literary metaphor, and that it was used just in order to refresh the poetical vocabulary of Russian poetry which had then been made barren by the symbolists' detachment from life. No, the poet was out for something more than *épater les bourgeois*. In fact, the 'thorny crown of revolution' was then unmistakably casting its shadow ahead. The Russian volcano was restive. The fumes after its recent grandiose eruption of 1905-6 were not yet altogether dispersed. The great disturbances of 1912 and the St. Petersburg barricades of the 1914 summer were portending the brewing storm. In the second year of the war which Tsardom precipitated, without being able to cope with the most elementary tasks of modern warfare, Russian life was anything but stable. The poet's sensitive intuition absorbed the atmosphere of growing uneasiness; and, because his was not a passive but a highly active intuition, he was able to translate the prevailing mood into words of dynamic expectation and hope. The poet's intuition certainly showed more political acumen than could be found in the views and calculations of the official legal politicians of that time; and this justified his claim to 'see that which nobody sees coming over the mountains of time'.

Yet, there were only very weak links between the poet's vision and that shape of a new Russia which was then being forged in the underground circles of the Bolshevik 'professional revolutionaries'. True, in his teens, Mayakovsky came in contact with some of the clandestine revolutionary groups; and that contact

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could not have failed to leave some mark on the poet's outlook. But the contact was on the whole superficial and casual—one of the many 'eccentric' experiences which served the unruly youth as raw material for his 'poetical output'. He could find very little inspiration in the stern rules of organization to which the professional revolutionary of the Bolsheviki school was submitted. Nor could the interminable interfactional arguments on the future structure of Russian agriculture, the trends in international Socialism and the political tactics of the Social Democratic deputies to the Duma capture his imagination. To see the mole of Revolution burrowing at the bottom of the social pyramid was surely for the young Mayakovsky an exciting and joyful experience. But he could have been only very remotely concerned with the specific programme and the scheme of action of the revolutionary mole.

The poet's rebellion had its own motives as well as its own independent logic. Its immediate target was the accepted traditional code of literary style—the poetic *bon ton*. His 'class foe' was not the landlord nor the capitalist, it was rather Konstantin Balmont, the exquisite symbolist, or Dymitry Mereshkovsky, the 'decadent mystic'. The sphere in which he strove to achieve a radical upheaval was the technique of verse-making and the vocabulary of the poet. His *Cloud in Trousers*, written on the eve of the first World War, was a bold challenge to nostalgic lyrics:

Gentle souls!  
You fiddle sweet loves  
But the crude club their love on a drum.

Do you know that  
François Villon  
when he finished writing  
did his job of plundering?  
And you,  
who quake at the sight of a penknife  
boast yourselves guardians of a splendid age.

Gentlemen poets,  
have you not tired  
of pages,  
palaces,  
love  
and lilac blooms?

If such as you  
 are the creators  
 then I spit upon all art.  
 I'd rather open a shop,  
 or go on the Stock Exchange . . .

The rebellious bohemian was insulting the 'contemptible pack of the literary brethren', but, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, he remained of and in it. The literary bohemia had few reasons, if any, to addict itself to the defence of the rotting social system of Tsardom. It lived uneasily on the outer fringe of that system. Nor did it feel any particularly strong urge to leave the ivory towers of art and to plunge into the whirlpools of social strife. The refined subtlety of the symbolist and neoromanticist poetry reflected an attitude of individualist haughtiness and social equanimity. But the quietism of the literary Olympus could hardly satisfy the young political innovator. The peaks of recognized poetry repelled him by their majestic immobility. The style of Balmont, Sologub and Mereshkovsky was as finished and polished and smooth as the unruffled surface of a dead pond. The young Mayakovsky was desperately trying to trouble that surface by throwing hard stones of futurism into it. The literary Olympus frowned upon or ignored those attempts at its tranquillity. But on the other hand, did not each of its legitimate lodgers start climbing the pathless mountain in a similar manner? Standing at the bottom one used to swear that one would climb the slope not in order to enter the temple at the top, but in order to destroy it. In the process of climbing, weariness was overcoming the wanderer until when the top was reached the initial fury had petered out. And the temple itself looked much more attractive when seen from the top than looked at from the bottom. In the literary threats thrown out by the vigorous and young Russian futurist the historian of literature might easily detect some features familiar to almost any conflict between two literary generations and two artistic styles. The annals of art are full of similar episodes. There was, therefore, little connection between the poet's artistic ego, which sought to assert itself by breaking the conventional codes of the literary milieu and the stern collectivist creed of Lenin's underground Marxian circles. The common feature was a negative one: hatred of an established hierarchy. But the struggle was being conducted on widely

different planes. Had there been no revolution in Russia, the bohemian youth might in the course of time have finished his career as a recognized luminary of Russian poetry, just as his Italian *confrère* Marinetti, who also started by storming the fortresses of literary tradition, and has ultimately won his place in the Parnassus of fascist Italy.

But the Russian revolution broke out before that act of literary reconciliation could materialize. Mayakovsky's poetical opposition had not yet been tamed by official recognition when it received new momentum from the tremendous social upheaval of 1917. The revolution appeared the most gigantic futurist spectacle that the poet could dream of. History itself was throwing overboard the old-fashioned mode of life—ergo the old-fashioned style of writing and painting and building. The new reality was crying out for new rhymes, new metaphors and new words. Who could provide them if not the author of the *Cloud in Trousers*? The quietist style of the traditionalist poet was suddenly reduced to a miserable relic of a doomed past; and the aggressive futurist metaphor found itself in harmony with the spirit of the time. Only yesterday it sounded an eccentric freak of poetic fancy—today the new reality imparted to it a compelling genuineness and a new weightiness:

Does the eye of the eagle fade?  
Shall we stare back to the old?  
Proletarian finger  
grip tighter  
the throat of the world.

Words which in 1916 might have been regarded merely as an arbitrary violation of the conventional—now had the backing of the social atmosphere of the country; and thus the alliance between Futurism and Bolshevism became a fact. Mayakovsky was the ardent flagbearer of that alliance.

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The heroic period of revolutionary strain and stress marked the climax of Mayakovsky's poetry. The alliance with Bolshevism elevated Russian Futurism to intellectual heights it would never otherwise have reached. It opened before the poet vistas which would probably have remained sealed to him in a quieter era. The fate of human masses, the potentialities hidden in them, the grand trends of history, the grappling of opposed social



orders, these were the problems which the revolution brought home to the rebel of the *bohème*. The ethos of the civil war, the unparalleled selflessness of the Red Guards, the upsurge of mighty 'heaven-storming' hopes, the moral appeal inherent in the endeavour to put an end to the exploitation of man by man—all these could not fail to capture the poet's mind and heart. True, there was also the squalor of the revolutionary terror, the outbursts of age-long and hitherto suppressed hatreds, the merciless anger of rising slaves whom life had not trained to exercise mild justice and human pity. This was but the dark lining to hopeful events; and the poet welcomed the revolution for its good as well as for its evil—as one mighty whole of the proudest human endeavour. At the end of the sanguinary path, there loomed the realm of freedom, the 'Mystery Bouffe' in which man had conquered the world of things to which he had before been subjected.

The bohemian did not dissolve in the roaring wave of the revolution. He retained his personality and remained true to his irrepressible individualism. He sang, of course, of the masses and despised the self-centred outlook of the pre-revolutionary lyrics. But, in a sense, he remained even more self-centred than his older literary brethren. He was not concerned with the subtle shades and half shades of private and intimate emotions. He beat the drum of the revolution instead. But in doing so he remained self-assertive to a rather unusual degree. The favourite pattern of the poetic drummer was to talk about *himself* and the *army* of the revolution; not about his love, his human joys and sorrows, but about his, the drummer's, contribution to the battle; 'At the top of his voice'—as if he wanted to overshadow the raging elements of history. Even when he tried to become one with the collectivist orchestration of the revolution he remained true to a deeply-seated individualism. This did not prevent Mayakovsky from becoming the poet of the revolution *par excellence*, but this was the germ of his tragedy. He would never be able to part with the revolution, but he would not either be able to merge with it to the end. Some false tone in the drummer's poetry could hardly have escaped the revolutionary trained in the Marxist school. Lenin himself dismissed Mayakovsky with the somewhat passéist observation that Pushkin's verses had been much better. The *quid pro quo* between the poet and the revolution could not be easily disentangled.

When the storm of the civil war was at last over, the poet found himself in a blind alley. The heroic epic of 1917-21 gave place to the prose of the NEP. Lenin proclaimed the Bolshevik's duty 'to learn from the bourgeois how to trade and to do business'. The new prose of the revolution was outwardly grey and uninspiring. This was hardly the truth. The manner in which the revolutionaries of yesterday turned from destruction to construction, from the negative to the positive part of their task, was indeed one of the most dramatic chapters of the revolution. The writer with a more philosophical approach might have found in this the subject matter for the true masterpiece of fiction. The onlooker with the *élan* of a Balzac or a Tolstoy might have put the new characters in the grandiose setting of history. The brilliant drummer of the revolution was, however, helpless. His voice, which harmonized so well with the tumult of the civil war, was now strangely out of tune with the new phase. His inclination and liking for hyperbole contrasted uncannily with the changed style of Bolshevism. The literary critics wrote of the crisis in Mayakovsky's development. His aggressive egocentricism was obviously alien to the philosophy of dialectical materialism and his bustling metaphors carried little conviction in that quieter era. The poet responded violently and scathingly. He accused the critics of passéism and once again proclaimed futurism to be the style of the socialist society. But this did not help him much in overcoming the spiritual crisis in whose throes he found himself. The crisis was not invented by the critics. It sprang from the tension between the poet and the revolution.

The rebel was no longer able to revolt. Not because censorship or external pressure forbade him to do so. The inhibition was of an internal and psychological nature. He was unable to keep abreast with all the twists and turns of new Russia, but he was equally unable to detach himself from them. He could not revolt against the greatest revolt in human history.

It is interesting to follow the poet's attempts to adapt himself to the new conditions. He tried to strike a utilitarian and didactic note. He turned to satire. The new world was not yet altogether new and it definitely called for some satirical whipping. The audience of that time was extremely receptive to the topical pointed verse which ridiculed the vices of the new rulers. Mayakovsky proved himself a master at that *genre*, as the English

reader can perhaps judge from his verse 'In re conferences'. But this definitely gave too little scope for his poetic temperament. In spite of the poet's claim to have inaugurated a new era of socially utilitarian poetry, his Muse was utterly un-utilitarian. Curiously enough, his best verses of that period were written on the journeys to capitalist Europe. There the Bastille stormer found his Bastilles still standing. He was again able to give vent to his combative temper and his poetic *élan* revived somewhat. In the atmosphere of the past, his futurist tirades and apostrophes were regaining their old defiant ring. It was in front of the Eiffel Tower, for instance, that he could again afford to indulge in the iconoclastic style:

It's not for you—  
 model genius of machines—  
 here  
 to pine away from Apollinairic verse  
 No place  
 for you—  
 this place of degradations  
 this Paris of prostitutes,  
 poets,  
 bourse.

The subtle escapism underlying such verses can hardly be missed. That the poet needed such escapes from the reality of the revolution was certainly no fault of the revolution; but it was the tragedy of the poet.

Years ago, it was fashionable in Russia to contrast Mayakovsky and Essenin. Indeed, the contrast between the two is in some respects very striking; but this merely stresses the ultimate analogy. Essenin was definitely 'passéist' in the social as well as in the poetic sense. His poetry was full of despair and longing after the old and doomed Russian village. It was, of course, not the feudal village of the old Russian literature, it was the moujik's melancholy which filled the cup of his poetry to the brim. And, like the moujik of 1917-19, he too was shaken by and drawn into the vortex of the revolution:<sup>1</sup>

Hey, Russians!  
 Trappers of the universe,  
 Trapping the sky in your net,  
 Blow loud your trumpets.

<sup>1</sup> Essenin's verses are quoted from *Modern Poems from Russia*, translated by Gerard Shelley (Allen & Unwin, 6s.).

## HORIZON

A modern sower  
 Roams in the fields,  
 Casting new seed  
 Into the furrows.

But the moujik was not the master of that revolution. After the storms of the civil war, he was again reduced to that state of political muteness, or semi-muteness, which had always been the lot of the peasantry. The shape of a new reality was destined to be forged in the town and to be imposed on the countryside. In the long run, the Russian peasantry could submit, only more or less reluctantly, to the schemes of collectivization and industrialization. The village was unable to produce its own independent revolution; it could only bow to a revolution from without. The sociologist may state the rule in detached, exact and cold terms. What the sociologists' *formulæ* cannot express is the deep and endless sorrow of that Russian village which now belongs to the past, but which was still awaiting the *coup de grâce* in the 'twenties. Essenin's poetry was an infinitely beautiful elegy on the doom of that village whose Russian name ('derevnya') is in its very sound associated with words like 'wood' ('derevo') and yore ('drevlye'). Here was the drunken and desperate poet whom the old wooden Russian village had sent to meet with a mournful swan-song the onslaught of the steel columns of tractors and harvester combines on its mouldering palisades.

I am the countryside's last poet,  
 A bridge of planks with lowly songs.  
 I stand at the farewell Mass of the birches  
 With quivering leaves like incense clouds.  
 My body like a waxen light  
 Will burn away in golden flame,  
 And like a wooden clock the moon  
 Will grind out my last twelfth hour.  
 An iron guest will soon appear  
 Along the track of the azur steppes.  
 His swarthy hand will gather the crops  
 Spilt all around like the golden dawn.  
 O lifeless cold and alien hands!  
 My songs can never live with you.  
 Only the ears of corn like steeds  
 Will mourn their tender master of old.  
 The wind will gather their plaintive neighs  
 And hold with them a memorial dance.  
 Soon . . . soon . . . the wooden clock  
 Will grind out my last twelfth hour.

'O lifeless cold and alien hands'—this was the greeting and the curse with which the poet met 'the iron guest'. In a sense, it is, therefore, true that Mayakovsky and Essenin were on the different sides of the barricade. They were certainly on the opposite sides of the poetical barricade. One was the drummer and the other the flautist. Both saw a world crumbling and old shapes pulled down by the avalanche of the revolution. Hence, their common disbelief in the solidity of any 'realistic' shapes. But here the difference begins. It would perhaps be difficult to find a poetic contrast sharper than that between Mayakovsky's hyperbolism and Essenin's 'imaginist' style. Essenin's verse is permeated with that image and colour that were almost entirely lacking in Mayakovsky's rugged poetical *paysage*. It breathed the elemental lyricism of the shepherd forlorn amid the dawn of Russian urbanism.

To every cow on the sign of a butcher's shop  
He doffs his hat from the distance,  
And when he meets a cabman in the square,  
Recalling the smell of his native fields,  
He's ready to carry the tail of the horse  
Like the train of a bridal gown.

Essenin's poems are now almost proscribed in Russia. This is surely one of those gross abuses in which post-revolutionary bureaucratic wantonness excels. In a historical perspective, cleared of the distortions of bureaucratic omnipotence and omniscience, Essenin will appear as the peak of contemporary Russian poetry. True, this is a highly passéist, one might say reactionary peak, but not more so than, for instance, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* which nobody has yet dared to suppress on account of its underlying sorrow and sympathy for the early feudal world of knights-errant. The obtuse post-revolutionary cacique 'in charge of literary affairs' has proved unable to sense the beauty of Russia's last peasant poet; he has not even been able to approach Essenin's poems with the detachment of a sociologist—which he purports to be—who may ponder with genuine curiosity over a most unusual and authentic document of the life of his generation. He has unscrupulously pigeon-holed Essenin as the bard of the counter-revolutionary koulak. The next Russian generation will surely take to re-reading the numerous palimpsests of Russia's post-revolutionary era and, from under the clumsy daubs of the

official scripture, it will rescue and recover—among many other names—the name and the memory of Essenin. True, it will find in Essenin's verse the beauty of decay and death rather than the grandeur of strife and endeavour—but it will be civilized and generous enough to allow the Muses the right to mourn their dead—a right which poetry has never ceased to claim—and to remove from the graves the policeman who now forbids access to them.

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Essenin's capitulation to death was in a sense natural. Too deeply had he been rooted in the past and in a passing social environment (only poets and artists so deeply rooted in a social milieu can be emotionally so genuine and convincing) to be able to reconcile himself to the new age. Not so Mayakovsky. He was in fact socially uprooted, and this ought to have made it easier for him to merge with the new reality of the revolution. Seemingly, he had very little, if anything, to suppress in his own mentality. In 1924, when Communist Moscow was burying Lenin's dead body in the mausoleum on the Red Square he was still able to burst out:

The fist of Europe  
is clenched  
in vain  
We'll crush them to dust.

But below the surface of the blustering rhetorics, there was already an uneasy misgiving about the bureaucratic Frankenstein which had been emerging from the revolutionary chaos.

I  
clean myself  
by Lenin  
to cruise  
still further  
in revolution's sea.  
Yet I fear  
the lines I'm penning  
as a youngster  
fears hypocrisy.  
That head is now laurel-wreath illumined.  
I'm only anxious  
it shouldn't shroud  
the genuine  
wise  
human

tremendous  
     Lenin  
         brow.  
 I fear  
     the mausoleum  
         and official functions,  
 established statute  
     servility  
 may clog  
     with cloying unction  
 Leninist  
     simplicity.

And further:

We  
     bury  
         now  
             the most earthly,  
 of all  
     who have lived  
         on this earth of men.

This vision of the new orthodoxy—the State-Church—which was to overshadow the revolution and subdue it to lifeless uniformity and thoughtless discipline—was in his poem on Lenin perhaps the most genuine and sincere flash coming from the depth of the poet's experience and emotion. In its intuitive strength and historical sensitiveness, it might be compared with that image of the 'thorny crown of revolution' which, almost a decade earlier, the poet had projected upon the screen of 1916. Then, he greeted his own vision and was ready to give himself up to it. Now, his vision was hunting him and he was trying to escape it and seeking to reassure himself. If need be, he would still be able to exorcise the ghost of the new orthodoxy with 'curse-words' and blasphemies; and 'they' would hardly be able to smother his cry and to drown him. But what if they would? What if the heavy, massive, relentless and blind Inquisition of the new Church proves—as it was bound to—the stronger side? It would, perhaps, mean reading too much into Mayakovsky's apostrophes to assume that the poet did ever put that question quite so clearly to himself. But there can be no doubt that he was acutely aware of the problem; and there can be no doubt, too, that his suicide gave, by implication, his reply.

The new Church was to gain an amazing hold both over the minds of its adherents and over those who rebelled against it.



It was to leave no room for schisms, heresies and iconoclastic sects. Its spiritual strength was—in spite of its utter lack of spirit—to become so compelling because it had never definitely severed the links with its revolutionary origin. In this one respect, it still stands almost unique among the older Churches. True, it has already been able to lure the conservative with its obvious denunciation of revolutionary principles, but it is still able to claim the allegiance of the revolutionary on the ground that it has preserved so much of the revolution's heritage. Hence, it was able to force to their knees almost a whole generation of revolutionary leaders and to exact the most ghastly confessions from them. The rebels of Bolshevism found themselves in a blind alley in which to fight the new Church was psychologically almost as impossible for them as to serve it. This was the background of their spectacular mass suicide in the trials of 1936-38. Mayakovsky's suicide in 1930 may be regarded as the poet's lonely prelude to the drama. Certainly, the poet was made of different stuff. He had no programmes and no slogans to propound. He would probably have been unable to reason over the conflict against which his life and poetry were about to founder. He simply sensed it with the infallible instinct of the rebel; and—without even trying to talk it out—he went under.

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Thus, his death, like his life, was an unconscious testimony to the *quid pro quo* of the poet and the revolution and to the strange mixture of enthusiasm and frustration which filled him as he saw the land of his 'Mystery Bouffe' coming so near, and yet being conquered by the priests of the new orthodoxy. In this last gesture, he nevertheless remained true to himself and to the *credo* of his youth. *Habent sua fata—poetæ*. The other drummer of European futurism, Marinetti, has, in the meantime, been swallowed and absorbed by the tide of fascism. In the autumn of 1942, he landed as a major of the Italian army somewhere on the steppe between the Don and the Volga. There, he stared into the face of bleeding, embattled Russia. There he was—as he said in an interview with the *Journal de Genève*—awestruck by the vastness of the Russian distance and the incomprehensible spirit of the Russian people. His confessions from the Russian front did not contain any note even slightly reminiscent of the blustering optimism of his youthful manifestoes. On the contrary, their

pessimism was as unintentional as genuine. Did this 'crusader' in the uniform of an Italian major stop for awhile to catch and recognize in the great Russian holocaust the rhythm of Mayakovsky's verse:

There—  
beyond sorrow seas  
Sunlit lands uncharted.  
Beyond hunger,  
beyond plague's dark peaks,  
marching of millions imprint!  
Let armies of hirelings ambush us,  
streaming cold steel through every rift,  
L'Entente can't conquer the Russias,  
Left!  
Left!  
Left!

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## SELECTED NOTICES

### LITERATURE OF THE SOVIETS

In the second volume of his *Outlines of Russian Culture*<sup>1</sup> Paul Miliukov has approached Russian literature in an original and instructive way by tracing its history as a process of adjustment between art and life and by showing how hard this adjustment has been and how writers have always been forced back into positions which reflect their own origins and prevent them from giving a comprehensive picture of the Russian scene or the Russian soul. He marks the way from the aristocratic and sentimental literature of the late eighteenth century and the 'classical' age of Pushkin through the great novelists and the revival of poetry in the 'nineties to the confused and frustrated movements of the last twenty years. He draws no conclusions and suggests no remedies; his outlook is scientific and historical and his main subject is of obstacles surmounted only to reveal new obstacles beyond. No doubt the literary histories of other countries might be treated in this way and reveal similar tendencies and defeats. But what is particularly interesting in Russia is the attempt of recent years to create a proletarian literature in the spirit of the Russian revolution. To this Miliukov devotes two of his five chapters, and much of what he says before seems to lead up to this experiment. Since his approach is

<sup>1</sup> University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942

rigidly scientific, it may not be out of place to make a few suggestions by way of comment on what he says.

In 1917, when the Revolution came, Russian literature was complex, creative and vital, especially in poetry which enjoyed a life such as it had not known since the death of Lermontov in 1841. The older Symbolists, Balmont, Bryusov, Ivanov and Sologub, were still at work; their inheritor, Alexander Blok, was at the height of his stupendous powers; the reaction against the mystical metaphysics of Symbolism had produced careful and distinguished work from Anna Akhmatova, Gumilev, and Mandelstam; new movements were coming to light in the Futurism of Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, and Pasternak, and in the innocent charming songs of the peasant Esenin. For a short period the Revolution seemed to give a new strength and a new direction to these eminent poets. Then something happened; the old fires were extinguished, and the second great age of Russian poetry was at an end. Balmont retired to exile and to lunacy; Gumilev was shot in 1921 for counter-revolutionary activities; Mandelstam published his splendid *Tristia* in 1923, then took to prose, and then disappeared from the world to exile or death; Khlebnikov tried to find new sources of inspiration among the Asiatic peoples of the U.S.S.R. and died in 1922; Anna Akhmatova was sentenced to silence after 1922 when she published her noble *Anno Domini*, and though she still lives, she has been allowed to publish no more books; Esenin, true peasant and supporter of the Revolution, was condemned for his love of the old 'wooden Russia', derided as a pornographic drunkard, and driven by starvation and persecution-mania to hang himself with the strap of his suit-case in a hotel in Leningrad. Mayakovsky remained, a devoted servant of the new order, and spent his great energies in every kind of useful literature, in advertisements, propaganda plays, attacks on the enemies of Russia from Woodrow Wilson to Curzon, in 'cautionary tales' for children, and poems on the dangers of God, disease, drink, love and other matters disapproved of by the Soviets. Then in 1930 he too ended his life with a bullet through his brain, though he had been the first to disapprove of Esenin's suicide. It is claimed that his death was the fruit of a Trotskyite conspiracy, but there is no evidence for this, and it seems probable that this prince of 'yes men' found the atmosphere uncongenial to creative work and could not endure to live any longer.

This is not a good record, and the enemies of the Soviet have naturally made capital out of it. They argue that only Trotsky believed in the right of artists to live their own lives and that his expulsion from Russia was the main cause of these disasters. The theory does not fit the facts. The old poetry expired before Trotsky was exiled, and it is unlikely that he did, or could have done, anything to help it. The reasons for the collapse were more deeply seated. The great revival of poetry from 1890 to 1921 was the work of a small, highly educated and sensitive class. Its members had private incomes, lived in an extremely intimate and cultivated society, and wrote for others hardly less educated than themselves. With the Revolution they lost their security, their independence and their readers. The new public was quite different. When Bryusov joined the Communist party and tried to educate the common reader in the advanced art of himself and his friends, he could not hope to succeed. This refined complicated literature was not needed or understood. It was not

only difficult; it was alien to the new age. Its mystical atmosphere, its belief in redemption through suffering, its cult of death, its emphasis on intimate personal relations, disqualified it for a positive and confident generation which regarded God and grief and love as fancies of a decadent bourgeoisie. The poets withered in themselves before they were condemned by the authorities. They could no longer draw life and encouragement from the public, and they ceased to write.

The public lack of interest in the established poetry was soon reflected in official action. The Communist Party was naturally suspicious of bourgeois intellectuals and had emphatic notions about the place of literature in the state. The result was a series of struggles between the writers and the more dogmatic supporters of the regime. On the whole the higher authorities kept their heads at first. Lenin, with his usual candour, said: 'To enable art to reach the people, and the people to approach art, we must first raise the general level of education and culture,' and 'It is too soon for us to dispose of what we have inherited from the bourgeois.' So long as he lived, the writers struggled on, and even secured some independence for themselves. During the New Economic Policy there was a promising outburst of comedy and satire. Some of the exiles returned, and were not unwelcome. It looked as if something new would arise and the writer be allowed to go his own ways. Even the old revolutionaries who had no love for the bourgeois intelligentsia seemed not to desire its immediate destruction or to think that literature was primarily a political affair.

With Lenin's death and the inauguration of the Five Years Plan the situation changed. It was now assumed that, since all efforts must converge to a single political end, literature too must conform and play its part like everything else. It was not enough for novelists to support the Soviet regime; they must proclaim its virtues, interpret its spirit and help its efforts by well informed propaganda. The writers found it hard to conform. The devoted Mayakovsky found that after all he was a truer poet than he liked to admit and committed suicide when his plays, *Bathhouse* and *Bedbug*, were banned by the authorities who, reasonably enough, detected a hidden satire in them. The gifted novelist Pilniak was thought to write in the wrong spirit, violently attacked in the whole national Press and forced to make a public recantation and to show his repentant spirit by writing his colourless but politically innocent novel *The Volga flows into the Caspian*. The authorities believed in literature but were determined that it should give publicity to accepted ideas. Writers who conformed were well paid and well treated, provided they did what they were told. The results were peculiar. For instance, the poet Sannikov had shown promise in his youth by simple verses about cuckoos and the countryside; he now wrote epics about the production of rubber, both natural and synthetic, and gave interesting figures about its development under government supervision. The old revolutionary, Sadofyev, never perhaps very gifted, found a suitable outlet in celebrating the heroic events of the Civil War. The output was large, but it was hardly, by bourgeois standards, good.

This remarkable policy was not really a success, even from the strictly political point of view. The novelists and poets, encouraged and even forced to write about subjects not of their own choosing and not always to their taste, did not produce good work. Indeed much of the poetry of this time

resembles Belloc's parody of a Newdigate Poem and abounds in such sentiments as

Here are the works:—from hence the current flows  
Which (so the Company's prospectus goes)  
Can furnish to Subscribers hour by hour  
No less than sixteen thousand candle power.

The authorities, sooner or later, were bound to see that bad literature defeats its own ends and will bring into contempt what it seeks to praise. Secondly, this literature failed often to do what was demanded of it. For instance, the novelists seemed curiously unable to depict the true type of high-minded Communist. Even their workmen lacked the true proletarian note, and the hero of Gladkov's popular novel *Cement* was found so unsatisfactory that his author was accused of abstraction, romanticism and decadence. Even the much praised Chumandrin introduced characters of a regrettably individualistic type into novels of factory life and contrived to gain his readers' sympathies for them.

Such a situation could hardly last, and in recent years the Soviet Regime has developed a new policy for literature. In 1932 the Central Committee of the Communist Party laid down new principles. Variety of styles and forms was proclaimed desirable; it was recognized that officials should not interfere with literature; the low level of existing work was admitted, and writers were advised to learn from the classics. This does not mean that writers are absolutely free to say what they like, but it does mean that they are not forced to write in entire conformity to a set of official instructions. The fruits of this new policy are beginning to become apparent. The standard of writing has already been much improved by the publication of scholarly editions of the Russian classics, well printed and well annotated. The editors, who include leading men of letters, have revived interesting figures from the past like the peasant poet Zurikov and are not afraid to give fair treatment even to aristocrats of the old regime like Pushkin's friend Vyasemsky. This interest in the past has produced some interesting historical novels, like A. N. Tolstoy's *Peter I*, in which the reforming Tsar is seen as a forerunner of Bolshevism, and Chapygin's story of the Streltsy revolt in the late seventeenth century. There has even been an improvement in poetry. The Siberian poet Sayanov has already returned to simple themes and is not afraid of sentiment. Mayakovsky has been reinstated and proclaimed by Stalin to be the greatest writer produced by the Soviet Union. His influence lives in the work of Kirsanov who shows how the old, bold, advertising style can be adapted to quiet domestic themes. To this revived literature the war has given a new impulse and confidence. Patriotism is sure to produce new manifestations of the Russian spirit, and there is a comforting rumour that Anna Akhmatova has been allowed to break her twenty years of enforced silence. Russian literature has before now had its long periods of poor art and fettered expression. The years between 1921 and 1941 are not much worse than the last years of Nicholas I or even than the drab period of Alexander III. The signs now are promising, and we may reasonably hope that the Soviets have solved the problem of literature in the proletarian state and discovered that though a government may help literature it cannot create it.

C. M. BOWRA



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